

Charles University in Prague  
Faculty of Education  
Department of English Language and Literature

BACHELOR THESIS

The conflict of masters and men in Elizabeth Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* and  
*North and South*

Střet pracujících a jejich nadřízených v románech Elizabeth Gaskellové *Mary*  
*Bartonová a Sever a Jih*

Julie Kloučková

Supervisor: Bernadette Higgins, M.A.  
Study programme: Specializace v pedagogice (B7507)  
Branch of study: B AJ-HV (7507R036, 7504R233)

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor thesis titled “*The conflict of masters and men in Gaskell’s novels Mary Barton and North and South*” by myself and that I did not use any sources other than those listed. I further declare that this thesis was not used to obtain another academic title.

In Prague April 16, 2021

I would love to express my gratitude to Bernadette Higgins, M.A. for her patience, motivational words and for the new things I got the opportunity to learn. Furthermore, I would love to thank my parents for their support and kindness which were a great help from the beginning to the end.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá podstatou, vývojem a vyvrcholením sporu mezi nadřízenými a pracujícími v románech Elizabeth Gaskellové *Mary Bartonová* (1848) a *Sever a Jih* (1854). Teoretická část se zabývá Industriální revolucí jako takovou a rozličnými historickými událostmi, které se zrodily a vyplynuly z tohoto období plného technologického pokroku a změn, a to především: “Luddite Riots”, “Corn Laws”, “the Hungry Forties”, Manchestrem a sociálními spory. Navíc obsahuje rozbor sociálních podmínek, které vyplynuly právě z Industriální revoluce a přetrvávaly i poté, co byla Industriální revoluce chápána za ukončenou. Stejná část se také zabývá rozličnými paradoxy a radikálními reakcemi, které vyplynuly z těchto industriálních změn. Praktická část je zaměřena na to, jak tyto problémy byly reflektovány ve dvou výše zmíněných románech, nabízejíc paralely mezi fikcí a realitou a analyzujíc sociální podmínky, dále se zaměřuje na spory jako takové, nespravedlivé sociální prostředí, ve kterém žili chudí a pracující nebo rozřešení konfliktů mezi pracujícími a jejich nadřízenými. Na romány Elizabeth Gaskellové můžeme pohlížet jako na ryzí svědectví všech těchto problémů, které nabízí barvitý popis alespoň zlomku hrůz, které se v této době děly.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Industriální revoluce, Viktoriánská éra, sociální střety, industriální román, Elizabeth Gaskellová, Manchester, teorie sociální třídy, Chartismus, nadřízení a pracující, silné ženské postavy

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis explores the nature, the development, and the culmination of the conflict between masters and men in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854). The Theoretical part is concerned with the Industrial novel as such and various historical events which stemmed from and originated in this era full of technological advancements and changes, particularly those which are relevant to the plots of both novels: the Luddite Riots, the Corn Laws, the Hungry Forties, Manchester, and class struggles. Additionally, it contains a pertinent analysis of social conditions which were triggered by the Industrial Revolution and were reflected even after the Revolution was believed to have ended. The very same part simultaneously observes the various paradoxes and radical responses which flowed from the Industrial changes. The Practical part observes how these issues were reflected in two of Gaskell's novels, offering parallels between fiction and reality, analysing the social conditions, the conflicts themselves, the unjust background the poor people were forced to live in and the resolution of these conflicts of the employers and their employees. Gaskell's novels might be perceived as a pure testimony of these predicaments, offering vivid depictions of at least a fragment of the atrocities of that time.

## **KEYWORDS**

The Industrial Revolution, the Victorian era, social class struggles, industrial novel, Elizabeth Gaskell, Manchester, social class theory, Chartism, masters and men, strong female characters

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	2
INTRODUCTION .....	7
1 THEORETICAL PART .....	9
1.1 The Industrial novel.....	9
1.2 Historical background.....	11
1.2.1 Industrialisation, the Industrial Revolution .....	11
1.2.2 Industrial hypocrisy .....	12
1.2.2.1 Child Labour .....	12
1.2.2.2 Wages.....	13
1.2.2.3 Social conditions .....	14
1.2.2.4 Hunger, the Hungry Forties.....	15
1.2.3 Reactions of the society .....	16
1.2.3.1 Chartism .....	17
1.2.4 Manchester, class politics and religion.....	19
1.2.4.1 Manchester .....	20
1.2.4.1.1 The Irish in Manchester .....	20
1.2.4.1.2 Manchester and class politics.....	21
1.2.4.2 Class politics .....	22
1.2.4.3 Religion.....	23
1.2.5 The overall perspective.....	24
2 PRACTICAL PART.....	25
2.1 <i>Mary Barton</i> .....	27
2.1.1 Masters and men.....	27
2.1.1.1 The depiction of the masters .....	27

2.1.1.2	The suffering of masters and men .....	28
2.1.1.3	The depiction of the men.....	30
2.1.1.4	John Barton .....	31
2.1.2	Social conditions and disparities .....	32
2.1.3	The conflict between masters and men.....	33
2.1.3.1	The problems between masters and men.....	34
2.1.3.2	The symbolism of the language employed.....	35
2.1.3.3	The murder of Harry Carson .....	36
2.1.3.4	The depiction of the murder: language and style .....	37
2.1.3.5	The reactions to the conflict .....	38
2.1.4	The resolution.....	39
2.1.5	Tools of reconciliation: Religion and a strong female character.....	40
2.1.5.1	Religion: the master's perceptions .....	40
2.1.5.2	Religion: the worker's perspective.....	41
2.1.5.3	Mary Barton as a tool of reconciliation between masters and men .....	41
2.2	<i>North and South</i> .....	43
2.2.1	Masters and men.....	43
2.2.1.1	The depiction of the master.....	43
2.2.1.2	The depiction of the men.....	44
2.2.1.3	Nicholas Higgins .....	45
2.2.1.4	Bessy Higgins.....	46
2.2.1.5	John Boucher.....	47
2.2.2	Social conditions and disparities .....	47
2.2.2.1	The difference between Northern and Southern England .....	48
2.2.2.2	The issues of North and South .....	48

2.2.3	The conflict between masters and men.....	49
2.2.3.1	The problems before the conflict .....	49
2.2.3.2	Reactions to strikes.....	50
2.2.3.3	The strike.....	52
2.2.3.4	The depiction of the strike: style and language.....	54
2.2.3.5	The clash between reality and fiction.....	55
2.2.4	The resolution.....	55
2.2.5	Tools of reconciliation: Religion and a strong female character.....	56
2.2.5.1	Religion: the master's perceptions .....	56
2.2.5.2	Religion: the man's perspective .....	57
2.2.5.3	The unifying power of religion .....	57
2.2.5.4	Margaret Hale as a mediator between masters and men .....	57
2.3	Comparison: <i>Mary Barton</i> and <i>North and South</i> .....	59
3	CONCLUSION .....	60
4	Works cited.....	63



## INTRODUCTION

While I was preparing for the final British literature exam, in the section focused on Victorian England, I stumbled across the name of Elizabeth Gaskell many a time. Her name resonated in my mind even a year after I successfully passed the exam. The reason of such reverberations presumably was that she was a contemporary of Charles Dickens and, also, a representative of the so-called “industrial novel” or “condition of England novel”. I wanted to learn more about such a genre, I was interested in exploring the living conditions of the people in the Victorian era, and I also desired to explore if the British literature lecturers were right about labelling her works as sympathetic and brimming with compassion.

The predominant goal of this thesis is to explore two novels by Elizabeth Gaskell; *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, which address the predicament of Victorian working-class society in respect of how their problems were resolved. The text offers a general overview of Victorian society, from the labour stratum living in substandard conditions to the carefree middle and upper-middle class people. Simultaneously, it analyses the imbalanced relationship between the masters and men and its culmination in various conflicts.

In the theoretical part, the genre of the industrial novel as such is discussed, and also the historical background in which it originated. This section includes the changes to society in Victorian Britain, pertinent industrial conflicts, Chartism, brief introduction to Marxian class theory, the growth of industrialism, particularly in Manchester, where the plot of Gaskell’s discussed novels took place preponderantly, and the area of religion, an essential part of people’s lives in the Victorian era.

The practical part is concerned with the analysis of the conflict between masters and men and the way the conflicts were portrayed and discussed. The analysis spans from the depictions of masters and men, the social conditions they lived in, the description of the various factors which contributed to the predicaments and last, but not least, it is also concerned with the religious side of the problem, perceptions of religion and its vital role in resolving the conflicts. Subsequently, the two main clashes are compared and contrasted briefly in regard to variable aspects.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels are one of the best literary sources available when it comes to the demonstration of the profound gap between the rich and the poor in Victorian Britain. Gaskell was very socially and politically aware, her books always contained extremely accurate depiction of various social problems. Her desire was to offer a veracious testimony of the

abominable standard of living of poor people and her readers, were and still are, confronted with her immense scrutiny of the conflicts which occurred due to the social imbalance and poverty. Moreover, it has been already implied that she is believed to have adopted rather an overall sympathetic approach towards the working-class characters, which can be perceived as a new phenomenon of that time. Her intention was straightforward. Not only did she want to write about the problems the current society was struggling with, but she also wished to inspire pity and compassion in the middle-class people.

# 1 THEORETICAL PART

## 1.1 The Industrial novel

The industrial novel, also recognised as “the Condition-of-England novel”, “social novel” or “social problem novel”, etc. (Diniejko) is a literary genre which, as the title foreshadows, deals with the social issues and related political imbroglios which were emerging in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England, “...especially around the period of the Hungry Forties” (Ibid.). Roughly speaking, this era, in particular, might be labelled as the period of time when the most paramount and emblematic works dealing with the aforementioned predicaments were being published: *Oliver Twist*, 1838; *Sybil*, 1845; *Mary Barton*, 1848; *Alton Locke*, 1849 (Keen). It is crystal clear that the authors such as Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, and Elizabeth Gaskell were focused on the atrocious living standard of the English poor, which mainly stemmed from the changes and progress the Industrial Revolution brought at the beginning of the century (Diniejko). What they desired to convey to the middle class was how miserable and full of struggle the working people’s life was.

One should be aware that particularly at this point in time, the British society was extremely stratified, as it is, to some extent, even today. As, e.g., Frederick Engels in his study “*The Condition of Working Class in England in 1844*” explains: “...the city is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people’s quarters, or even with workers... this arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement..., the working-people’s quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle-class...” (389). The poor and the rich resembled two well and truly disparate universes. No correlative or other relations could be detected. Separation, ignorance, and lack of interest are probably the most suitable expressions to describe the situation of that time.

Indubitably, such a social structure could not be everlasting. There occurred an increased number of conflicts and problems and people started to be concerned with this horrendous situation. Consequently, some of the writers commenced offering fictional stories taking place in a realistic background, providing their readers with realistic depictions and raw data. Eventually their effort contributed to the emergence of different social reforms and changes concerning the needy classes.

Especially Elizabeth Gaskell was interested in how detached the classes were and she was fascinated by the hypothetical situation which would occur when representatives of two

different social backgrounds would be brought into contact. She devoted her novels to the clashes of the social classes and to how such conflicts could potentially be reasoned and solved.

The following theoretical part offers a brief summarisation of the most significant events and issues which preceded, accompanied, and followed the origination of this genre. The individual entries are interconnected with the vital phenomenon of that time, i.e., the Industrial Revolution, as well as with the literary field and especially with the novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. What is essential is that all the issues which are discussed influenced and shaped the relationship between the masters and men to a rather significant extent. Moreover, one should bear in mind that the conflict between the masters and men, which is the topic of this thesis, is omnipresent, sometimes being the cause, at times, just an accompanying circumstance of other issues and predicaments.

## 1.2 Historical background

### 1.2.1 Industrialisation, the Industrial Revolution

Industrialisation and the British Industrial Revolution are two almost interchangeable terms which are extremely pertinent when it comes to the historical background of *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Certainly, this era might be perceived positively, being emblematic of various economic and technological advancements (James Watt's steam engine, 1775 (Kingsford); Eli Whitley's cotton gin, 1793 ("Cotton gin")<sup>1</sup>, etc.), simultaneously inspiring new approaches towards commerce and business. However, one needs to acknowledge that this warp-speed development brought many downsides as well, and that not everybody was influenced by this progressive boom in a positive manner.

The Industrial Revolution is commonly located between the years 1750 and 1830 (Church 536). Nevertheless, it might be claimed that its influence overreached the time margins and that its far-reaching impacts can be traced even in the times which succeeded (Ibid.).

When it comes to the definition of the Industrial Revolution, it might be perceived as a complicated conundrum to denote this phenomenon in a clear and straightforward way. As it is claimed in the following excerpt "/the term/ has been used so often, and in such different ways, that it has come to mean all things to all men. It has become an assumption rather than a reasonable precise term... and historians have used the term very freely, causing much confusion in the process" (Cameron 562). One of the plausible explanations could be that "some historians tend to "isolate its essential economic characteristics", others take a broader view, stressing that "it involved the transformation of society, politics and ideas as well as the economy" ("The Origins of the Industrial Revolution" 71).

Presumably, the best case in point when it comes to the examination of the Industrial Revolution from the economic perspective, is the Manchester megalopolis, which will be scrutinised later (see 1.2.4.1).

As implied above, British industrialisation can be surely understood in terms of progress and technological improvement, conversely, it might be also studied as a social phenomenon: "in the way the middle class was formed, the common people adapted to an industrial society and the social and political institutions adjusted to economic developments." (Ibid.).

---

<sup>1</sup> Even though Eli Wheatly was an American, it is rather crucial to mention his contribution as well.

Moreover, what can be analysed as well within the social sphere are various paradoxes which the Revolution brought, e.g., child labour, the completely substandard living conditions the people lived in, or the period of the Hungry Forties, which was an utterly opposite outcome than what was expected from such an era of development.

## **1.2.2 Industrial hypocrisy**

### **1.2.2.1 Child Labour**

“When I was between seven and eight I found myself with many children of about my age or older standing at the spinning frames... 13 hours a day five days a week and eleven on Saturday.” (Humphries 396). This is a genuine testimony of Robert Collyer born in 1823 (Ibid.). Another testimony roughly from the year 1800 explains: “the hours of child labour in mills which ran night and day were unrestricted by law, and there was no supervision of the mills by factory inspectors” (Brockbank 170).

The suffering of the children was the major grievance of the working men in this period and both novels discussed in this thesis featured it. With reference to what has been mentioned above, one might assume that such a state of affairs was completely normal even in the thirties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is rather unbelievable in regard to how advanced all the machinery already was. Logically, the children were needed for delicate manipulation with various machines, but from completely objective perspective, one can state that this was an utterly negative impact of the Revolution as such. What is understandable is that the underaged labourers were needed to contribute to the family budget, but conversely, they could not live fully-fledged lives due to the injuries, accidents and limitations which stemmed from being employed from an early age.

Only nine years later after Collyer’s testimony, i.e., in 1832, were the children’s working hours limited and the child labourers were categorised into disparate groups according to their age and needs, a result of the “1832 Reform Act” (“The 1833 Factory Act”). A year later, another act was published which was even more consequential: it forbade to employ children under the age of nine and it limited the working scheme to eight hours a day for children from the age of 9 to 13, moreover, there was established a Factory committee which ran broad investigations throughout various textile mills and other factories (Ibid.). Still, using child labour with advanced machines cannot be called anything other than hypocrisy.

Jane Humphries argues that child labour was a demonstration of inequality and poverty, and “a socio-economic effect of the industrialization as such” (397). Additionally, what she also states

is that “child labour, in terms of child participation rates and younger working, increased during the classic era of industrialization, and that this influenced the pace and nature of economic change” (398). This was conspicuous not only in the society itself but also in its reflections. From the literary field, one can commemorate Elizabeth Gaskell and her industrial novels, or Charles Dickens’ testaments which flowed from his childhood experience – his working in a factory at an early age of his life resulted in numerous and extremely enthusiastic attempts to demonstrate against child labour as such and to try to abolish it, too, which eventually happened.<sup>2</sup>

#### **1.2.2.2 Wages**

It is commonly understood that trade and wages are interrelated and when commerce does not go well, the people’s incomes reflect it. What might be perceived as paradoxical is that during the Industrial Revolution Era “many businesses dwindled, shrank, and finally went bankrupt despite the generally favourable economic climate...” (McKendrick 47), which was straightforwardly mirrored in people’s earnings. Even though it would be rather attention-grasping to offer detailed graphs and diagrams demonstrating average wages of various labourers in this period of time, according to Bowley and Wood, two prominent statisticians, “it is almost impossible to obtain a detailed piece of information regarding any industry as a whole, moreover, such statistics seldom have been done for single firms.” (Bowley, Wood 149). Another source offers a different but fascinating angle from which to observe this situation: “A worker in 1870 might make 150% what a worker in 1850 made, but because different prices had increased at different rates, the actual buying power of wages increased only moderately” (Skipper, Landow). One should not be surprised that the issue of wages gradually augmented the worker’s dissatisfaction and when one takes into consideration the following quote: “What certainly played a major role in igniting working-class protest in the early 1840’s was the payment of wages in tokens that could only be spent either at the employer’s store – referred to as truck – or elsewhere in overpriced “tommy shops” that accepted such tokens.” (Gurney 109), it is not surprising at all that this predicament was increasing in importance and that it eventually became, hand in hand with the social condition issue, the basis of all the conflicts which arose subsequently.

---

<sup>2</sup> British literature lecture and seminar information

To sum up, what is indubitably connected with this phenomenon is the social condition predicament as such. British families in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found it difficult to subsist and survive.

### **1.2.2.3 Social conditions**

Social conditions are paramount not only with regard to the era, but also in terms of both *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Even though each of the plots occurs in disparate social environments, it is of high importance to observe the Victorian poor people's milieu to offer a solid and information-based background for the subsequent practical analysis.

It is clear that the living conditions of this time, especially of the labourers and poor people, absolutely did not fulfil the required minimal standard of living, neither the hygienic nor other norms. The aforementioned Frederik Engels made multitudinous references to the appalling conditions, particularly in Manchester, an industrial superpower. In the excerpt from "*The Condition of Working Class in England in 1844*" I had the opportunity to analyse, he, for example, stated that "...in the whole region, for each one hundred and twenty persons, one, usually, inaccessible privy was provided" (397), which could have triggered cholera or other epidemics with ease (398). Additionally, "...all the houses in the district were damp and the cellars once filled up with earth have now been emptied and are occupied once again by the Irish people" (398) - this could not contribute in any way to the people's good health nor their welfare. Additionally, Engels frequently made references to the issue of stratification among the people with regards to their conditions: "...the commercial and residential quarters hide grimy working-men's dwellings – they suffice to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement of their wealth" (390).

Not only were healthy circumstances and equal life chances not secured but neither did the Victorian government "protect its children, men, nor women from an economic disaster created by unemployment" (Landow). The historian Eric Hobsbawm uttered an apt phrase summarising the whole Victorian situation with the following words: "Nothing is more characteristic of the Victorian working-class life, and harder for us to image today, than the virtually total absence of social security." (Ibid.).

Furthermore, not only were there problems related to unemployment, social security, or the inhumanity of child labour, but the period between the years 1800 and 1850 was additionally



massively burdened by the arrival of food deprivation, in some parts of Great Britain even the appearance of starvation:

#### **1.2.2.4 Hunger, the Hungry Forties**

The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain was tremendously affected by food deprivation and other economic-related issues, which eventually culminated in the period of the Hungry Forties:

For three years past trade had been getting worse and worse, and the price of provisions higher and higher. This disparity between the amount of the earnings of the working classes and the price of their food, occasioned, in more cases than could well be imagined, disease and death. Whole families went through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings. And yet even his words would fall short of the awful truth; they could only present an outline of the tremendous facts of the destitution that surrounded thousands upon thousands in the terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841. (Mary Barton, 62)

The whole era of starvation stemmed from numerous causes among which the Napoleonic Wars must be certainly listed, a conflict which indubitably did not contribute to any economic enhancement. Other reasons hampering the overall economic and social improvement were trade changes, shortage of food due to the failure of crops which took place at the beginning of the century (Mokyr) and the related and pertinent laws which occurred due to such a crop scarcity (Ibid.).

Such regulations were, e.g., the Corn Laws, which originated in the year 1815 (Bloy, “Corn Laws”). They “were designed to protect English landholders by encouraging the export and limiting the import of corn when prices fell below a fixed point” (Ibid.). This was originally a watershed in the British economy, subsequently, the authorities encountered predicaments which had not been expected. What the Corn Laws resulted in was that “the price of food increased and consequently depressed the domestic market for manufactured goods because people spent the bulk of their earnings on food rather than commodities” (Ibid.). Moreover, “the Corn Laws also caused great distress among the working classes in town ... because these people were unable to grow their own food and had to pay the highest prices in order to stay alive.” (Ibid.).

Obviously, some of the poor desired to show their disapproval of such a budget deprivation. One manifestation of this disapproval is unquestionably “the Peterloo Massacre”, an event which arose only four years later after the Corn Laws were introduced – in 1819 (Bloy, “The

Peterloo Massacre”). The Peterloo Massacre, having occurred in Manchester, was a conflict where the labourers wanted to prove to the authorities that they were “respectable working men, worthy of responsibility” (Ibid.). The workers’ goal was to peacefully convey to the authorities such a message that they wanted “a more people for people government and that they strived for political and social betterment” (Ibid.). Unfortunately, the people at the demonstration were perceived as threatening and were attacked by the militia which was hired by the local authorities and the originally intended peaceful event resulted in eleven deaths and a plethora of injured (Ibid.). This event can be compared with the key scene in Gaskell’s *North and South* which resulted in an utterly opposite way (see 2.2.3.3, 2.2.3.5).

Another cause, which had the biggest impact in terms of death ratio and emigration, was the occurrence of the “Great Famine” in Ireland. The food shortages occurred between the years 1845 – 1849 (Mokyr) and they affected the economics and food policy in Britain, the market of which was even in the beginning of the century “supplied with almost insufficient amount of Irish cereal crops, which the Irish farmers failed to provide themselves as well” (Ibid.). Even though the British were aware of the severity of the situation, they kept transporting supplies from Ireland to Britain, which resulted in hatred, rebellion, and emigration (Ibid.). And not only did the British continue to export the Irish goods, but they even “stuck to the politics of consumption during a period of starvation and food deprivation” (Gurney 99). This terrible suffering undoubtedly enhanced the creation of the industrial novel where these predicaments were incorporated as an omnipresent backdrop of the melodramatic plots of the novels.

### **1.2.3 Reactions of the society**

It is rather devastating to acknowledge that there occurred such amounts of social problems in this period of blossoming and flourishing, both rather symbolical epithets of the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne, as well as the reverberations of industrialisation. The constant insecurity about employment, rising food prices, child labour, decrease of wages and the isolation of the working-class people can be seen in many a literary work which originated in this era and even later. Even though the conditions are depicted rather meticulously in various texts, books, and documents, it is impossible to fully imagine and know the horrors and struggles of the most vulnerable people.

What seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility, too, was to make any kind of change to such a situation, which resulted in people’s resignation, stagnation, and consequent acceptance, at times, at least. However, there are always those of a rebellious nature who will not acquiesce

to one-sided rules and whose revolt can, over time, evolve and resolve in various conflicts, riots, and strikes.

One such conflict which must be commemorated is “the Luddite Riots” which occurred at the onset of the century, in the year 1811 (Bloy “The Luddites”), but, of course, they were only the first in a chain of similarly oriented events. The Luddite Riots were property protests destroying machinery, which were carried out by people who feared that they would lose their jobs. The reason for such a reaction was that losing a job basically meant starving since, as it has been already established, there was no social security provided by the government in this period of time. The people attacked the newly introduced machinery because they feared that they would be deprived of their work opportunities due to the mechanisation and new technologies<sup>3</sup>, which were, of course, interconnected with the appearance of the Industrial Revolution. As an article in the British Medical Journal reveals: “at that early period of the introduction of machinery every contrivance that increased production was looked upon by the workpeople as certain to deprive them of their means of existence; consequently, they endeavoured to wreck all such new inventions...” (Brockbank 169). At first, additional workmen were needed to support the new and technologically not advanced machines, later, the labourers were gradually exchanged for water, steam, and other means of power engines (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, one of the disapproving reactions which were triggered by the Industrial Revolution and its impacts was the establishment of the Chartist organisation, which Gaskell was clearly interested in. Chartism was perceived as extremely radical and incendiary, which seems ludicrous today because the Chartists presented demands which are now recognised as utterly normal and common. One might assume that the Chartists were only crying out for minimal standards and that their intention was not to enrage the higher social classes, but to reach at least some balance within the unbalanced society:

### **1.2.3.1 Chartism**

Not only can Chartism be perceived as a reaction to the struggle of classes and striving for amelioration, but it plays a major role in both Gaskell’s novels as well. To fully comprehend its impacts on the characters, it is advisable to summarise and go through the most paramount facts connected with the Chartist movement:

Joseph Rayner Stephens regarded Chartism as “a knife and fork, a bread and cheese question” (Gurney 108). It is no wonder he phrased the problem as such. The working people were

---

<sup>3</sup> British seminar and lecture information

ravenous, and they did not desire to observe the government's limitations anymore. Furthermore, in Britain, there existed such rumours as "...workers were eating carrion or even each other in order to avoid starvation..." (Ibid., 102), which conspicuously signals the relation between politics and social conditions, which the Chartists intended to change.

Chartism represents a phenomenon which occurred in Britain towards the end of the 40's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though its origin can be traced approximately to the year 1776 (West 12). Chartism can be comprehended as a "parliamentary reform movement predominantly of the era between 1837 and 1848" ("Chartism"). The aim of this radical movement was to democratise the British political system of that time (Everet). Their aims were as follows:

1. votes for all men;
2. equal electoral districts;
3. abolition of the requirement that Members of Parliament be property owners;
4. payment for M.P.s;
5. annual general elections; and
6. the secret ballot. (Everet)

As Julius West claims in his book *"A History of the Chartist Movement"*, "the originally middle-class agitation was transformed into a working-class interest" and "the organized labour became for the first time a factor of importance in the life of the nation" (11).

The predominant figure of this movement was William Lovett (West 50, 51). Not only was he connected with the Chartist Movement, but he was also an emblematic representative of other organisations such as *The National Union of the Working Classes*, or the *General Metropolitan Trades Union*, which came to existence slightly after, both highly relevant in terms of improving working-class people's working conditions, simultaneously fighting for more acceptable wages (Ibid.). Eventually, the latter was merged with the former; "their objectives being to gain the right to vote and to diminish the working hours of the factory and other labourers" (Ibid.).

The Chartists' objectives were to "combine government intervention and community regulation to help poor consumers squeezed by industrial capitalism as well as protectionism" (Gurney 101). In other words, the Chartists' "common theme within their rhetoric was concerned with the deleterious effects of continual want and exploitation on the working-class family." (Ibid., 107).

The most important document of the whole movement is *"The People's Charter"* from the year 1838 (West 81, 89), which demanded the very same six points as stated above. Additionally, a

manifesto published a year later claimed that “the Government of England is a Despotism and her Industrious Millions are Slaves” (Gurney 107).

Unfortunately for the main leaders, the termination of the movement was not the most peaceful one. Had not it been for the radical forced conflict at Newport the leaders would not have been imprisoned or sent to Australia (Bloy, “Chartism”). The Chartist glory terminated in the year 1848, its significance gradually ceasing, eventually evaporating a decade later (Ibid.).

It is also significant to state that the Chartist movement was not the only active movement concerned with labour in relation to politics during this period. In 1839 the so-called “*Anti-Corn Law League*” (Gurney 102) was formed, the objectives of which were to “complete economic freedom, which could be done exclusively by the separation from the political and economic realm” (Ibid., 101). Additionally, they imagined the targeted “*body*” of people as “*consumers*” (Ibid.), which was a different stance to the Chartists. However, what is crucial to acknowledge is that some of the members were clearly in both camps, on the same sides, having the same goals, some of them just taking advantage of such an opportunity to belong to a movement which offered more business-oriented approach, as can be explored in the following quote from Gurney; according to him, the Anti-Corn Law League “pitched its appeal to the people who they imagined as a body of exploited consumers”, whose enemy were “aristocratic monopolists, because they reduced people to slavery.” (Ibid., 103).

These organisations desired to act promptly, and they wanted to be noticed and heard: “Perhaps Chartism was a matter of feeling... (it was) a cry for help.” (Bloy, “Chartism”). In 1839, there occurred the Chartist uprising (Rectenwald), a goal of which was to “organize a monster petition to Parliament” (Rogers 144).

Not only should we consider different revolts and conflicts in terms of social reactions. What one should bear in mind as well is the occurrence of the movements themselves. One should acknowledge that the movement itself was “born of poverty, hunger, desperation and failure” (Bloy, “Chartism”), and this is more than enough when it comes to the analysis of the industrial impacts on the society and its reactions.

#### **1.2.4 Manchester, class politics and religion**

In this section the city of Manchester will be discussed, as it might be perceived as the engine of the Industrial Revolution and it is also the best case in point when it comes to class theory and its analysis, because it was Manchester in particular, which was an immense inspiration for Marx and his class theory. The theory is mentioned because the originators were closely related

with the city of Manchester, thus they could easily explore how the phenomena of industry, classes and religion were interrelated (Gemkow 254).

#### 1.2.4.1 Manchester

Not only is Manchester, bearing the nickname “*Cottonopolis*” (“Household Words” 269), the city affected the most by the Industrial Revolution but moreover, it is the explicitly stated background of *Mary Barton* and more than implied background of *North and South*. The relation presumably flows from the impression that the cities in both novels were cotton-production laden, as well as burdened by the smoke and filth which was always accompanied by manufacturing of this kind.

The city of Manchester gained its importance and crucial position predominantly during the Industrial revolution and onwards. Surprisingly, already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the city was esteemed and recognised for its high-quality cotton production (Brockbank 169), which contributed to its swift industrial expansion and recognition. The cotton production went hand in hand with the introduction and usage of new and more advanced machinery, mainly in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The technological and economic boom, however, triggered a massive augmentation of the population, which resulted in horrendous living conditions as will be established in the following paragraph (Ibid.):

According to Engels’ testimony, the circumstances were alarming:

Above Ducie Bridge..., the condition of the dwellings on both banks grows worse rather than better; ...one passes filthy nooks and alleys..., ... ruined buildings, some of them actually uninhabited... and a state of filth! Everywhere heaps of debris, refuse and offal, standing pools of gutters and a stench which alone would make it impossible for a human being in any degree civilised to live in such a district. (392)

Furthermore, to make the depiction of Manchester complete, Engels frequently mentioned the chaotic structure of buildings, no sources of clean water for the labourers (meanwhile for the middle-class and upper-middle class people there was a plethora of them), and “fittings for doors and windows” were hardly present, used only scarcely (393).

##### 1.2.4.1.1 The Irish in Manchester

The Irish in Manchester is an essential subchapter since the Irish workers and the issues interconnected with employing them were depicted in *North and South* and from the overall perspective it is an important issue to examine with regards to the conflict which happened after

the Irish workers had been introduced in one of the mills where the English labourers declined to continue working.

According to Mervyn Busted, Manchester and Ireland were interrelated for centuries (i). The period when the Irish population was significantly augmented was in the “period from 1845 to 1850’s” (Busted ii), which corresponds with the time when the “Great Famine” issue arose. What the Irish contributed to was that they “reinforced the already existing Irish districts... and provoked a mix of alarm and concern amongst the authorities, the existing population and the Catholic Church” (Ibid.). It might be hard to acknowledge that within the separation among the rich and poor there simultaneously existed another “separation” which was mirrored amongst those on the breadline: English and Irish workers (Werly 345). John Werly reported that “it was evident in the early 1830’s that the Irish lived separately from English workers and also existed in a state of greater poverty than the native English... they seldom settled in English neighbourhoods... and there were very few Irish with whom the English mixed; it was like oil and water” (346). In another passage of Werly’s work, one can observe that life in Manchester could not be struggle-free: “Black smoke, polluted rivers, unpaved streets, the smell of pig sties, privies, and open sewers, coupled with the filthy, cramped cellar dwellings with their barren, damp interiors.” (347), that is what Manchester looked like in the middle of the Victorian era. Last but not least, “the houses inhabited by the Irish were built by the horrible system of huddling cottages together, back to back, in stress without drains or any means of carrying away the refuse from the doors of the houses” (348).

#### 1.2.4.1.2 Manchester and class politics

It has already been established that the city of Manchester is connected with the famous name of Friedrich Engels (Gemkow 254), who even used Manchester as the chief subject of his analysis called “*Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*” (Ibid., 57), because “Engels was astounded by the scale of capitalist production and the vehemence of the class conflict...” which was present in this industrious city (Ibid., 58).

Not only is the Manchester agglomeration connected with the concepts of Marxism and working-classes studies, but there are also other phenomena, e.g., Chartism or the concept of the Labour Party (Hill 171), which is rather logical due to the already established fact that it was one of the most populated cities in England, providing working-class people with at times stable, but sometimes underpaid jobs, too. This is the reason why Manchester can be recognised as the most emblematic example which illustrates the mechanics of capitalism (Ibid.). It might be comprehended as the heart of the new contradictory existence of huge wealth and terrible

starvation, which was reflected in the chasm between the rich and the poor and it mirrored how the workers were exploited and distressed, as well.

#### **1.2.4.2 Class politics**

To offer a compact depiction of the whole social background of the novels, it is advisable to comprehend the driving force behind the Marxian class theory and how in particular it correlated with social class distinction and people's beliefs and religion:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation. This mass is already a class against capital... This class becomes united, and it results in a struggle: social and political. (Andrew 579, 580)

According to Marx, it was logical that workers were against money-driven politics thus it cannot be surprising that they revolted against such conditions. What one should emphasise is that not only did Marx recognise the political struggle, but he also acknowledged the social aspects as well. Presumably, this quote highlights the nature of the antagonism between the two classes the best, and it implies the potential threats which could have arisen and did arise from such economic circumstances. It only proves the theory that was offered in the beginning of the thesis that the people were stratified, indeed, and that such stratification only caused difficulties. Another thing which is emphasised is that the people should be unified to succeed at achieving their goals and requests. Such unification can be demonstrated by the Chartists' organisation or the Trades' Unions, which came into existence approximately three decades after the Chartists stopped existing ("Working life"). These organisations were striving for betterment, and they actively advocated various changes. The people would not have ameliorated anything if they had not been united and if they had not cooperated well and persistently. And still, they succeeded at changing the rules and limitations only at a snail's pace, step by step, moreover, they were perceived rather antagonistically by the rich and mighty. This was the reason why the poor were enraged and why they became "a class against capital".

As Karl Marx explains, "the people had been transformed". The originally "country people" were transformed into "masses of workers". One might be dubious about the different life spheres in which this transformation was displayed; whether it was mirrored only in the social sphere, or whether some other life areas were affected as well. In relation to Karl Marx especially, one life area comes to mind: the area of religion:



### 1.2.4.3 Religion

Karl Marx is famous for his dictum that “religion is the opium of the people” (McKinnon 1). He emphasised the thought that people, and especially workers, needed to liberate themselves, he proclaimed that the church was an utterly limiting institution which the society needed to be deprived of (Ibid.).

Conversely, Elizabeth Gaskell, herself a Unitarian (North and South, 7), adopted a completely different perspective. What is implied in her novels is that she did not perceive the institution of the church as completely limiting, moreover, she did not want her characters to be radical, or revolutionary as Marx’s thoughts insinuated. She rather used religion to soothe people’s problems and it was also one of the tools of reconciliation between masters and men. These approaches stemmed from her Unitarian beliefs: “beliefs that God and religion unite everything and everybody, and that people should adopt an overall liberal approach towards life and people in general”, because: “religious freedom is at the heart of Unitarianism” (“Unitarianism at a glance”).

Upon comparing Marx’s and Gaskell’s approaches, one realises that Marx was more incendiary, he desired an active resolution, he wanted to rebel and strike whereas Gaskell believed more in religion’s calming effects, its ability to pacify and unite. She was probably of the opinion that the era she was living in was already brimming with problems and conflicts and that no more were needed. She did not perceive religion as “the opium of the people” because from this quote, one senses something pejorative, something with harmful effects. And this was not her approach. She perceived religion as a supportive tool, helping all her characters regardless of their sins:

In Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, religion soothed antagonistic approaches between masters and men (Mr. Carson against John Barton), religion helped to overcome losses of various relatives (Mr. Carson’s mourning over the loss of his son; Nicholas Higgins’ grief was conciliated as well by a discussion with Mr. Hale, occasionally containing some religious overtones), the Bible came to the aid to those who had to endure difficult life situations (Mary Barton trying to come to terms with Jem Wilson’s trial – (Mary Barton, 190)). Religion can be even perceived as support for various female characters who were the driving forces of the plots, as without their intrepidity fostered by religious texts, the stories would have evolved in completely different ways and they would not have been perceived as mediators and pacifiers between masters and men (see 2.1.5.3, 2.2.5.4).

To summarise, Karl Marx's and Elizabeth Gaskell's viewpoints on religion differed entirely. Karl Marx rebelled against religion, his rebellion stemming from the notion that religion was making people more passive and disinclined to deal with their social problems, therefore he promoted active rebellion, whereas Gaskell emphasised that religion could be a tool of pacification and that it could contribute to alleviate people's burdens and the tension between masters and men as well.

### **1.2.5 The overall perspective**

To recapitulate, the Victorian era was full of paradoxes; child labour versus advanced machinery, where the technological advancement at times resulted in various collapses of business; people were getting wealthier and simultaneously poorer, religion was observed as a hindrance, as well as a tool of pacification and betterment. We should not forget the numerous clashes between the poor and the authorities. All these predicaments of course were accompanied with feelings of dissatisfaction, helplessness, and sometimes even with hatred. Therefore, we can see the genre of the industrial novel as something which was required and needed, because it enabled the writers to demonstrate these living and working conditions and at the same time, it allowed them to alert their middle and upper-middle class reading public to these issues and conflicts which needed to be solved.

## 2 PRACTICAL PART

This part is concerned with the practical analysis of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* in terms of class struggles, which reflected the conflicts between masters and men, simultaneously exploring the various impacts of the industrialisation on the poor.

To briefly summarise the plot of *Mary Barton*, one can state that in this book Gaskell observed how much the working men were frustrated with the working conditions their bosses secured for them and how their despair culminated in the killing of Harry Carson, the son of their employer. The novel, of course, contains rather a romantic side story of Mary Barton trying to find love, another side story which is concerned with John Barton's attempts to change the conditions he and his fellow friends and co-workers lived in, as well as the melodrama of finding the right culprit responsible for the murder.

In *North and South*, Gaskell chose to look at the problems of the Industrial North from the perspective of a protagonist from the rural South. Margaret Hale got the opportunity to observe closely what was happening to the underpaid northern workers and she brought us a clear testimony of their suffering and discontentment. Additionally, she also triggered a plot twist when she saved many a life in a threatening strike. Moreover, she offers us a down-to-earth observation of the social disparities between the northern entrepreneurs, the southern gentility, and the northern labourers. These observations are accompanied with a storyline about fragile romantic feelings between her and the entrepreneur Mr. Thornton, and another side story which gives us a deeper insight into the Chartist-like environment interconnected with the effects of the reverberations of the Industrial revolution in Milton.

From the structural perspective, there can be found five aspects, which are rather akin: the first one is concerned with the masters and men and the injustice which stemmed from such a stratification (see 2.1.1, 2.2.1), the second one explores different factors which contributed to the culminations of such struggles (see 2.1.2, 2.2.2), the third one is focused on the conflict analysis itself (see 2.1.3, 2.2.3), the fourth one observes the resolution of the conflict (see 2.1.4, 2.2.4), and the fifth one takes into consideration women and religion (see 2.1.5, 2.2.5), which are two phenomena interrelated with each other, both representing two different means of reconciliation between masters and men. Moreover, within these similarities there are other similarities which are going to be explored in the following paragraphs:

What might also be perceived as a similarity is the overall arrangement of the plot. The reason could be that the novels were produced and published in instalments, a Victorian England

publishing tradition. The fact that the books were being published chapter by chapter increased the readers' anticipation, the books' intermittent release certainly augmented the melodrama the novels contained, at times, the endings of some chapters were true cliff-hangers, which guaranteed the readers' interest in reading the upcoming chapters as well.

Another aspect which is shared is the romantic nature of the stories. It might be argued that the author's goal was to convey her message to as many people as possible, therefore she committed herself to a decision that the main characters should be strong and brave and that the romantic subplot should be full of love obstacles so as to be appealing while conveying the didactic message to the masses of readers. The strong female characters need to be emphasised, because Mary Barton, who helped Jem who was accused of a murder somebody else had committed, is indubitably a major driving force of the plot as such, and Margaret Hale from *North and South*, who contributed to the dispersal of the crowd of people striving for revenge before the militia had the opportunity to act violently against them, is a paramount character, without whom the novel would not have the emotional impact it has.

From this brief comparison, it is obvious that both analyses will target the same or similar topics. Furthermore, the main goal of the practical part is to observe, depict and analyse the nature of the conflicts and the correlative phenomena. All the five sections mentioned are based on and are interrelated with the historical facts offered in the theoretical part, trying to highlight how the conditions of the working people led to conflicts between masters and men and how these conflicts were depicted, reflected, and conveyed in the literary world.

## **2.1 *Mary Barton***

I would argue that in both sections, on *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, it is advisable to start with the portrayal of the representatives of both rival classes to better understand the conflicts which occurred between them:

### **2.1.1 Masters and men**

#### **2.1.1.1 The depiction of the masters**

The wealthy businessman Mr. Carson was portrayed as a man who preferred his own gains and prosperity to his workers' welfare. He was depicted as a rough, refractory man who achieved what he set his mind on. The attributives, which will contribute the most to his characterisation, would probably be: "merciless, wintry, and obstinate". That is how his workers perceived him, which is an interpretation shared with the majority of readers, one would surmise: "Mr. Carson was considered hard and cold by those who only casually saw him or superficially knew him" (Mary Barton, 281). Eventually, his hostility was disrupted and neutralised by his son's murder.

Mr. Harry Carson Jr. seemed to be affected by his father's wealth and influenced by the notion that their family conditions would never be different. In comparison with his father, his behaviour indicated that he took his family's wealth for granted, which was, of course, reflected, in his conduct towards the outer world, e.g., to Mary Barton. As it might be understood from the following quote, Harry Carson represented the genuine lavishness of the upper-middle class in its most emblematic form: "His dress was neat and well appointed, and his manners far more gentlemanly than his father's. He was the only son, and his sisters were proud of him; his father and mother were proud of him: he could not set up his judgment against theirs; he was proud of himself." (50). This stance might be even supported by another quote which comes from the discussion led by Harry's two sisters: "He is a good, kind brother, but I do think him vain, and I think he hardly knows the misery, the crime, to which indulged vanity may lead him." (149). What might be comprehended from this quote is that Harry Carson was, indeed, a conceited character, which might even support the following assumption:

The assumption is as such: on the one hand, Mr. Carson should be the evil character in the plotline but on the other hand, when it comes to his overall actions, he did not behave as badly as his son, Harry.

What one might only conjecture is that Mr. Carson even though tough, strict, and merciless was probably a better master to his employees than his son would have been. This speculation flows from the fact that Mr. Carson married a woman from a similar background as Mary Barton was,

which was the initial and original reason why the main character thought it feasible to get married to Harry Carson, too. What is more, Mr. Carson was also known not to have proceeded from a wealthy background and to some extent, he became “a self-made man” through his own zealous approach and business luck and effort, which certainly was not the case of his son. No matter how strict he was, Mr. Carson had a greater potentiality to relate to his workers’ problems, even though he did not want to and initially, he did not even intend to: “...amongst the most energetic of the masters, the Carsons, father and son, took their places. It is well-known, that there is no religionist so zealous as a convert; no masters so stern..., as those who have risen from such a situation themselves” (125).

His son, who was brought up in truly disparate circumstances, if not assassinated, would certainly not have been able to link to his potential employees’ issues and he would have been oriented towards his gain even more than his father, simultaneously being even harsher and less compassionate, if one can use such word in relation to the Carson family. Moreover, even though Mr. Carson senior proceeded from a poor family background, it can still be argued that he would have been more susceptible to relate to his workers’ problems than his son, even though “no masters are so stern ..., as those who have risen from such a situation themselves” (125). The presumption stems from such a notion that he certainly must have had some similar first-hand experience with hunger and other issues of the poor at least during his childhood, therefore one would assume that he would have been more lenient towards the labourers due to these memories if some sort of appalling disaster struck. Contrarily, one can argue that his workers were already exposed to rather disastrous events and he did not give an inch.

Nevertheless, what is indubitable is that Mr. Carson senior certainly did not like being exposed to danger as much as his son did, the cause of which was probably Harry’s youth: “Harry Carson did not trouble himself much about the grounds for his conduct. He liked the excitement of the affair. He liked the attitude of resistance. He was brave, and he liked the idea of personal danger...” (126). What might be comprehended from this quotation is that Harry Carson liked resistance and violence and that he certainly was not someone who would have chosen a peaceful strategy of reconciliation, nor agreement, partly due to his personality, partly due to the environment he proceeded from where he always got what he desired.

#### **2.1.1.2 The suffering of masters and men**

One comprehends that the workers believed that their masters “never suffered” because of their wealth and comfortable lives, which cannot be further from the truth. Mr. Carson suffered to a great extent when his son was murdered, furthermore, his pain was extraordinarily grave, as

can be understood from the following excerpt: “Presently, Mrs. Carson’s hysterical cries were heard all over the house. Her husband shuddered at the outward expression of the agony which was rending his heart...” (153), which only shows that even the Carsons, even though affluent, were normal human beings with standard feelings and normal perception of the world even though shaped by their rich breeding: “...Then the three sisters burst into unrestrained wailings. They were startled into the reality of life and death...” (155).

When one compares this manner of behaviour with the representatives of the poor, they might argue that those on the breadline did not respond to such atrocious occasions so “theatrically” as Mrs. Carson did. Of course, the people were extremely sorrowful, and they perceived the demise of their offspring with grief and respect, but simultaneously, they proceeded from such a social background where people were more accustomed to such events than the representatives of the higher strata, as is mirrored by the demeanour of Harry’s three sisters and their mother.

Indubitably, the point which Gaskell was trying to make was that at times, the victims of suffering and death are not chosen according to their social status but rather randomly and potentially fairly, which makes all of us eventually equal, which might be the only occasion when the people of the Victorian era were on a par with each other, regardless of class stratification, wealth, or breeding: “Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart... The mourner before him was no longer the employer, the enemy, the oppressor, but a very poor and desolate old man” (266).

Another case in point which demonstrates that the rich were also victims of suffering, is portrayed in the chapter called “Murder”:

Mrs. Carson ... was very poorly, and sitting upstairs in her dressing-room, indulging in the luxury of a headache. But it was but the natural consequence of the state of mental and bodily idleness in which she was placed. ... It would have done her more good ... if she might have taken the work of one of her own housemaids for a week; made beds, rubbed tables, shaken carpets, and gone out into the fresh morning air, without all the paraphernalia of shawl, cloak, boa, fur boots, bonnet, and veil, in which she was equipped before setting out for an “airing”, in the closely shut-up carriage. (148)

From a reader’s perspective, Gaskell made a subtle point about the lifestyle of the upper-class and what consequences such a lifestyle could have brought. The author contrasted the lives of a well-married woman and her maids. What might be perceived as surprising is that the woman

who was thought to be cheerful and carefree the majority of the time, and who was believed not to be afflicted by anything at all due to her life full of leisure, suffered from her being rich, this resulting in her discontentment flowing from her idleness, obliviousness and non-perception of the world around her. If one compares this “contrived” health issue with, e.g., the case of the “helpless, hopeless woman... who was past hunger and who fell down on the floor with a heavy unresisting bang” (45) or with the “industrial disease” of Bessy Higgins (see 2.2.1.4), one realises how ludicrous Mrs. Carson’s headache trouble was. The phenomenon of inequality is demonstrated here perfectly: the poor were starving and simultaneously suffering from serious health conditions whereas the rich were able to construct various health problems, which were not even reason-based, nor did they stem from any real cause. Therefore, it is true that the rich suffered, however the disparity between suffering of the rich and the poor was that at times the hardship of the affluent could be justified, but for the majority of times, it could not.

To sum up, the author provided us with a complex viewpoint: she proved that both social layers offered advantages and disadvantages and that complete happiness could not be sought in either of the classes. The difference lay mainly in that the poor did not have the opportunity to choose, whereas the rich were the creators of their destinies at least partly, which probably contributed to the origination of the conflicts between these two rival classes as well.

### **2.1.1.3 The depiction of the men**

“There’s never been good times sin’ spinning-jennies came up” (64).

The workers were worn-out, anguished and presumably at the end of their tether. They acknowledged the fact that there was less work for them due to the new machinery which entered the factories in the beginning of the century, clearly an emblematic example of the industrialisation expansion. Thanks to the augmented food prices, rents, and declining wages they were forced to live on the breadline, and sometimes, they were even driven to desperate actions: “I’ve seen a father who had killed his child rather than let it clem before his eyes; and he were [*sic*] a tender-hearted man” (137).

They certainly desired to alter their situation and working conditions. One gets the impression from the overall atmosphere of the book that they were already rather desperate, their depression certainly having been broadened by the period of the Hungry Forties. That might be the reason why they committed themselves to such a hopeless decision as to assassinate Mr. Carson junior. They wanted to be heard but they were not (vide Mr. Barton and his London



visit, when his petition was rejected by the local authorities, (83)). And they craved to change it. Swiftly.

The workmen in *Mary Barton* can be perceived as more enthusiastic and incendiary than those in *North and South*: “With Spartan endurance they determined to let the employers know their power by refusing to work” (125); “They were empowered to accept or decline any offer made that day by the masters... and they declined...” (134).

John Barton was probably the most emblematic representative of the working class even though he did not represent the poorest of the poor:

#### **2.1.1.4 John Barton**

John Barton was an energetic man who did not want to give up and who was able to grit his teeth on every occasion. His stubbornness gradually evaporated with his increasing age, but readers might appreciate his determination to fight as long as possible. Even though he might seem a quitter when it comes to his opium addiction: “...opium gives forgetfulness for a time” (123), one should bear in mind that due to the conditions he was living in and the problems he was encountering every day, this was and is utterly understandable. As Karl Marx stated, some people needed religion, some opted for other means of escapism. He was an extremely good father to Mary and even though they became estranged eventually, they still esteemed each other to a high extent. His fierce spirit was demonstrated in his attempts to take part in various peaceful strikes or protests. He was a member of a so-called Trades’ Union. He was even appointed to go to London in a vain attempt to alter the political situation and to talk some sense into the authorities.

He labelled himself as a “*folk-lover*” who always had in mind the people’s best interests. Gradually, he realised that he could not love all the people in the same manner: “All along it came natural to love folk, though now I am what I am. I think one time I could e’en have loved the masters if they’d ha’ letten [*sic*] me; that was... afore my child died o’ hunger. I was tore in two... between my sorrow for poor suffering folk, and my trying to love them as caused their sufferings.” (269). This could have been the reason why he “became a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. But being visionary is something... it shows a soul, a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself” (124).

He suffered from a medical condition called “*monomania*” (123): the sort of medical issue when someone is affected by “exaggerated or obsessive enthusiasm for something” (“Monomania”): “John Barton’s overpowering thought, which was to work out his fate on earth,

was rich and poor; why are they so separate, so distinct, when God has made them all? It is not His will that their interests are so far apart. Whose doing is it?" (124). He wanted to do good deeds and he desired the world to become a fairer place to live in. He was so obsessed and so passionate about the injustice between masters and men that he needed very little to tip him over the edge.

John Barton can be perceived as the most symbolic representative of the poor because "he was actuated by no selfish motives; that his class, his order, was, what he stood by, not the rights of his own paltry self" (124), which the people acknowledged and felt.

### **2.1.2 Social conditions and disparities**

"If you think so, tell me this. How comes it they're rich, and we're poor? I'd like to know that. Han they done as they'd be done by for us?" (48).

The theme of inequality in *Mary Barton* was omnipresent. It spanned from how the Barton family lived, across what Mary and her father did for a living, to how their fellow friends struggled, everything additionally intensified by the comparison with the household of Mr. Carson and the stylish way of life this affluent family had.

The notion one might get is that the representatives of the poor stratum were, to some extent, reconciled with the circumstances they lived in. Mary obediently found a job for herself when she realised that her father was struggling to get paid properly due to the work shortage in the mills. And John Barton was incessantly attempting to become employed when he lost his previous occupation. Apparently aware that they still enjoyed the luxury as obtaining some reasonable income at least occasionally, throughout almost the whole novel, they also did not have any problems regarding the payment of their rent or purchasing food. They had little, but like their friends (Margaret, her Grandfather, Jem, his family, and Aunt Alice) they could subsist.

Gaskell was aware of the complexity of the class structure, she made it rather clear that there were differences between the subsisting and the starving poor. Possibly, the source of the inspiration could have come from the ghettoised Irish group living in Manchester, whose conditions were incomparably worse than those of the English workmen performing the very same jobs (see 1.2.4.1.1).

An example of the subsisting and the starving impoverished can be seen when Mr. Barton sold his belongings to gain some money which he subsequently gave to the needy wife whose husband had died of hunger and fever:

... Then he went upstairs for his better coat, and his one, gay red-and-yellow silk pocket-handkerchief – his jewels, his plate, his valuables, these were. He went to the pawnshop; he pawned them for five shillings; he stopped not.... He bought meat, and a loaf of bread, candles, chips, and from a little retail yard he purchased a couple of hundredweights of coal. Some money still remained – all destined for them, but he did not yet know how best to spend it. Food, light, and warmth, he had instantly seen were necessary; for luxuries he would wait. Wilson's eyes filled with tears when he saw Barton enter with his purchases. He understood it all, and longed to be once more in work that he might help in some of these material ways, without feeling that he was using his son's money.... (45)

Judging by the quote, *Mary Barton* was set in the appalling era of the forties and fifties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Gaskell's portrayal of the starvation well explains the cause of the revolt of those whose wages were cut utterly due to unemployment or due to the augmented food prices and food shortages of that time.

The gap between the rich and the poor is huge in the novel and it can be understood through the language which was used by the employers. The employers called their employees "*hands*" (19), which was an utterly demoting term that did not signal an inch of fairness or human equality. There can be no wonder why the workmen revolted against it. This treatment might almost bring a parallel to the American expression "*chattel*", which was used for denoting the slaves brought from Africa, perceived as entities used for work and nothing else, with diminished or no rights.<sup>4</sup> Even though the term rather denotes "an item of property" ("Chattel"), it might be argued that it served to the same purpose: it described a person with limited freedom, reduced prerogatives, and no possibilities.

### 2.1.3 The conflict between masters and men

"... class distrusted class, and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both. The masters would not be bullied...; they would not be made to tell that they were even sacrificing capital to obtain a decisive victory over the continental manufactures... And the workmen sat silent and stern with folded hands, refusing to work for such pay. There was a strike in Manchester." (125)

The clash among the working-class representatives and the master himself culminated in the act of assassinating John Carson's son. The conflict itself was not represented by any riots, nor

---

<sup>4</sup> American literature seminar and lecture information

strikes as one would potentially expect. Unfortunately, the act of the murder was rather more violent and severe than the strike in *North and South*. It might be argued that the workers acted more harshly and severely than they should have but when one takes into consideration the social circumstances and their previous attempts to change the situation, the act of the murder is understandable:

### **2.1.3.1 The problems between masters and men**

Before the murder itself several meetings among the masters and their workmen had taken place. One of them, which was described in the chapter “*Meeting between Masters and Men*” was depicted as: “...some (masters) were for a slight concession, just a sugar-plum to quieten the naughty child, the sacrifice to peace and quietness. Some were steadily and vehemently opposed... it was teaching the workpeople how to become masters, said they... They forgot that the strike was in consequence of want and need” (132). It is crystal clear that the employers did not come to a unanimous consensus on how to alleviate their workers’ disgruntlement. Moreover, considering the excerpt, the masters seem not to have comprehended the issue at all. It seems that the employers simply desired to punish their labourers for rebelling against their authority. Unfortunately, they were focused on the visible outcomes of their workpeople’s dissatisfaction only, not on the causes of the deeply rooted problem. This was one of the reasons why the workmen’s rage was gradually increasing until it culminated in the murder, because the only goal the poor fellows had was to transmit the message of their starvation, fatigue, and desperate situation. Nevertheless, their masters reacted to their peaceful revolt in a completely hostile way. They declined the work people’s requests and they also took more severe measures in terms of employing workmen:

Firstly, they declared all communication between the masters and that particular Trades’ Union at an end; secondly... no master would employ any workman in the future unless he signed a declaration that he did not belong to any Trades’ Union; and thirdly, that the masters should pledge themselves to protect and encourage all workmen willing to accept employment on those conditions.... (134)<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, Gaskell depicted this master and men assembly in a brilliant manner: She highlighted how essential this meeting was for the labourers and simultaneously, she drew the

---

<sup>5</sup> The Trades’ Union Gaskell is talking about in the quote resembled the Chartist movement which was at its peak in that period. Trades’ Unions were established some decades later (“Working Life”) therefore it can be assumed that she was depicting the actions and approaches of the Chartists, even though she called the organisation “Trades’ Unions”.

readers' attention towards how the masters considered the whole situation. For the men, the meeting was a question of life and death, for the masters, it was only an unpleasant event which they needed to go through, as swiftly as possible to return to more appealing, entertaining, and, for them, more important activities.

Clearly, another reason which caused the violent effort to change these circumstances was the long-lasting mixture of substandard living conditions and low wages. Nevertheless, had the masters explained and talked with their employees, the situation might have ended differently. However, this is only wishful thinking which could not be performed in the Victorian era due to the impermeable class stratification. The predicament was that "they stood upon being the masters and that they had the right to order work at their own prices, and they believed that in the present depression of trade, and unemployment of hands, there would be no great difficulty to getting it done" (125).

The reason why the masters did not want and probably could not understand the root of the men's issue was that they were driven by economic competition with their opponents because: "a duplicate order had been sent to one of the continental manufacturing towns... and they dreaded that the goods could be made at a much lower price than they could afford them for..." (124) Therefore, one cannot be surprised that: "The masters' interest was to buy cotton as cheaply, and to beat down wages as low as possible. And in the long run the interests of the workmen would have been thereby benefited. Distrust each other as they may, the employers and the employed must rise or fall together." (125).

To summarise, there were a plethora of problems: reduced wages, unyielding masters versus the famine-stricken poor; misunderstandings in terms of the causes of the problems, the masters' disinclination to listen and to help. Additionally, there was one issue more which occurred during the meeting: the caricature created by Harry Carson.

### **2.1.3.2 The symbolism of the language employed**

Gaskell decided to emphasise the severity of the predicaments not only through writing about them but also through the way she wrote about them: Not only was she determined to highlight the differences of the style of their speech, where she opposed the formal language of the entrepreneurs to the colloquial language of the poor, but she also managed to highlight the disparities between them through what the people had or had not in possession. She chose two objects of everyday usage: a shirt and a pen:

At the meeting, one of the labourers was so poor that he was not even wearing a shirt and he was attempting to conceal it by “pinning his coat up as much as he could” (136). Conversely, Harry Carson, who was present during the meeting as well, had an object that symbolised his wealth: a silver pencil: “... he took his silver pencil and had drawn an admirable caricature of them-lank, ragged, dispirited, and famine-stricken... It was sent round to others, who all smiled and nodded their heads... then he tore the picture in two... and flung the pieces into the fireplace” (134). Through this situation in particular Gaskell managed to describe the indescribable: by focusing on these two everyday objects, she symbolised the chasm between the rich and the poor, the gap between abundance and shortage. Moreover, she managed to highlight what the presence or absence of such objects could result in:

### **2.1.3.3 The murder of Harry Carson**

It might be questionable whether the final straw was the caricature, the problems, or the refusal of the labourers’ proposals. What one might be sure of is that the caricature certainly displayed an infinitesimal lack of respect, which was even deepened by the approval of the masters who had the opportunity to see the picture. One can comprehend why this was so provocative. The labourers realised that the masters did not even perceive them as equal human beings when it came to face-to-face confrontation. This had already been clear from the dehumanising expression the masters used to call them (see 2.1.2), however, what was new was how the denigrating picture was accepted in front of the assembled labourers and in how transparent the masters’ behaviour was in terms of lack of respect. It is also uncertain whether the workmen decided to assassinate Harry Carson because he was the author of the insulting drawing or because he was the son of the master who was the most heard, the most prominent, and the most unyielding. However, it is clear, that the picture deepened and augmented the workmen’s rage: “It IS a shame, and I will not stand it.” (136) and it resulted in “a deadly plan” (138). The members of the Trades’ Union met and reached the conclusion that they would kill Harry Carson.

One might wonder why the Union members opted for such a harsh way of dealing with their desperate situation. There surely were various other ways they could have decided on instead of a murder, which is from the religious perspective an abominable sin. Readers might assume that the workers had already been rather patient and that they had made several attempts to enhance their situation, but everything was in vain, or if successful, only partially and temporarily. Presumably, Harry Carson became the target not only because he was meant to suffer because of his spiteful behaviour, but also for his father’s strict decisions concerning the

labourers and the complete absence of approval of their proposals regarding their working conditions. Another reason might be that Harry Carson was just a pure embodiment of all that the labourers did not comprehend, approve of, or like.

What is thought-provoking is that the Union men committed themselves to destroy the Carson family in terms of family happiness, which was rather contrastive to what the Union (Chartists) were promoting and believed in. Moreover, not only did the act of the murder affect the Carson household, but it had an enormous impact on the Bartons as well, because it almost prevented Mary Barton marrying Jem, the man of her heart, which would have resulted in damaging not only one nuclear family, but two of them.

Those on the breadline wanted to demonstrate to the rich that they were also powerful if harmed and possibly, through damaging the Carson household, they desired to show them how difficult it was when parents were deprived of a child regardless of the reason of their demise. They chose this terminal solution because their employers' decisions had the very same impact on them, or their relatives, as it had on the Carsons. One might almost assume that from the labourers' perspective, even though aware of the sinful nature of their violent act, they could not perceive it as something which would be completely damned by the Highest Judge, because in their opinion they did the right thing. In other words, they destroyed one family, but they helped many others to survive or even contributed to the betterment of their living standard.

The conflict discussed in this novel was fairer in terms of the number of people involved: the clash between the assassin and his victim was even – in terms of participants, however, it was not so balanced when it came to the weaponry and preparedness. What is more, one cannot label the subsequent judicial proceeding as fair at all and had it not been for Mary Barton's intrepidity, Jem Wilson would have certainly been charged with the murder. Compared with *North and South*, it must be stated that in terms of the punishment with regards to the masters, Gaskell was harsher in *Mary Barton*.

#### **2.1.3.4 The depiction of the murder: language and style**

It was so quiet and still that she could hardly believe it to be the place. The only vestige on any scuffle or violence was a trail on the dust, as if somebody had been lying there, and then been raised by extraneous force. (170)

Gaskell opted for a rather subtle way of conveying the message of the murder; spanning from the type of language she used to the way she depicted the atrocious deed. From the quote above, one might learn that she decided to employ an utter contrastive language technique: quietness

versus violence, the stillness of the day against the brutal force of the previous night. Moreover, she employed the play of light and dark as well: “Bright, beautiful came the slanting rays of the morning sun. It was time for such as she to hide themselves, with the other obscene things of night, from the glorious light of day, which was only for the happy” (171). What one comprehends is that Gaskell contrasted the brightness of innocence, emblematic of the normal, at times optimistic, daily procedures with those of the obscure and violent nature of the night.

Apart from this, the author swayed the readers’ minds towards the false culprit, and she revealed the truth only at almost the very end of the book, which might be understood as a rather cunning but appealing technique culminating in almost a cliff-hanger ending.

### **2.1.3.5 The reactions to the conflict**

The reactions to the conflict can be observed from two perspectives; from the perspective of the master, who was the victim of the culminated anger of his workers, and from the perspective of his labourers who had been the targets of the master’s severe conduct before:

The master’s point of view is rather clear; when Mr. Carson learnt about his son’s murder, he was devastated. This trauma, however, lasted only briefly. After a split-second, his sorrow and frustration was transformed to rage and desire to revenge the atrocity which was performed on his son. He offered considerably high amounts of money to those who would find the right culprit. He blindly sought vengeance, which became his only life goal. The reason could have been that he did not want to recall the memories connected with his son, he possibly needed something to be occupied with in order not to become insane as his wife did. Mrs. Carson did not manage to accept her child’s demise and her mental health was indubitably affected by this family tragedy. Mr. Carson’s approach was understandable but not justifiable anymore when there were more and more pieces of evidence which signalled that Jem Wilson was not the right person to have been accused and to stand on trial as well. After this, Mr. Carson’s persistence was not the endurance of a wounded parent anymore but of a person who could not accept that his plan did not reach the goal he originally intended – to punish the murderer.

From the workmen’s stance, the murder was embraced with mixed feelings. It was evident that the labourers did not like Mr. Carson and his family, they were feeling oppressed in each sphere of their lives. The dislike is evident, for example, even in Mary’s Aunt Esther’s train of thought: “Her sympathy was all with them, for she had known what they suffered; and besides this, there was her own individual dislike of Mr. Carson, and dread of him for Mary’s sake” (171). Contrarily, even though the poor loathed Mr. Carson, they did not perceive the murder as a



completely deserved punishment as well. Interestingly, the people's rage was turned against the culprit, the aforementioned Jem Wilson, who was thought to have committed the appalling deed. Moreover, it seemed that the people's disgust with the Carsons even ceased to some extent for a marked period of time. This could have been partly because the assassination was a novelty, a sensational event, and that it was conducive to the people's forgetting for some time the Carsons' behaviour due to this more important occurrence, or the reason might have been that even though the people were feeling limited, the oppression did not deprive them of the ability to sympathise with their fellows, no matter from what social background the people came.

#### **2.1.4 The resolution**

The conflict was resolved in the way the workmen thought the best. They were aware that they had agreed on a deadly sin, but they perceived it as a balanced solution to all their predicaments. They believed that this action would be powerful enough to alter Mr. Carson's behaviour. At first, it was not, but then he gradually changed his stance.

Furthermore, Gaskell managed to keep her readers on tenterhooks for a noteworthy period of time, only at the end of the book was it revealed that John Barton was in fact the assassin. John Barton's behaviour was also altered after the murder. He became bad-tempered, he was addicted even more to opium than before. It is rather difficult to say whether he regretted the deed or not, but he was certainly filled with remorse after he learnt that a wrong person was accused. His emotional tumult was visible, it was clear that his decision whether to confess to the murder or not was hanging in the balance for some time.

We need to acknowledge that an active deed (of not having agreed to the labourers' requests) triggered an active response (murder), but with time, the antagonism, which was present in both characters, who were connected the most with the murder (Mr. Carson and John Barton), gradually diminished and then evaporated, partially due to their faith in God and the Bible. What might be considered as paradoxical and unexpected is that the assassination, which was against all religious beliefs, brought people to a complete religious resolution.

In the resolution, Gaskell's sympathetic approach is evident. Not only did she depict the poor characters, e.g., Jem and Mary Barton, sympathetically, but she was also sympathetic to Mr. Carson, which is a rather surprising approach when we consider how severely Mr. Carson was portrayed earlier in the novel and how harsh his actions were. Through this she tried to show to

her readers that people's behaviour can be changed when there is enough patience, kindness, and acceptance, everything accompanied by a faith in God:

### **2.1.5 Tools of reconciliation: Religion and a strong female character**

It has been already established that religion played a significant part in Gaskell's works and it would be advisable to explore how the Bible and religion affected some of the characters and how the different characters understood and perceived it:

#### **2.1.5.1 Religion: the master's perceptions**

Mr. Carson was not affected by the Holy Scripture much at first. He did not behave according to it and took nothing from the Bible into consideration. He did not need it. He was wealthy and his business was flourishing, he did not need his thoughts to be calmed. Nevertheless, when his life turned upside down, he required some pacification and then he remembered his Bible. The book was almost brand new, and it seemed not to have been used ever before: "...he went silently upstairs to his library, and took down the great, large, handsome Bible, all grand and golden, with its leaves adhering together from the bookbinder's press, so little had it been used" (268). At a second glance, one learns that the type of language Gaskell used to describe the Bible was maybe of higher importance that it seemed to have been at first. The author might have wanted to emphasise that the book, adorned and decorated, was, despite its significance, not used in Mr. Carson's household at all, moreover she highlighted the paradox of the book being essential and still not used. The point presumably was that when people do not suffer, they easily forget the saints and biblical texts that help them with their difficulties in harsher periods of their lives and that they remember them only at the eleventh hour. The message Gaskell was attempting to get through in this part was that people who were wealthy and not troubled much by various life predicaments usually did not require the comfort of the Bible, which was certainly a different kind of behaviour to the poor and poorer, who sought their comfort through this book and its teachings much more often and whose versions of the book were less adorned and usually dog-eared due to the frequent usage.

Nevertheless, the assassination of Harry Carson was such a shock for Mr. Carson Senior that he went through a religion-related realisation, which eventually made him a better person. "... the wish that lay nearest to his heart was that none might suffer from the cause from which he had suffered; that a perfect understanding ... might exist between masters and man...; in short, to acknowledge the spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties" (281). Mr. Carson clearly came to an extremely significant and relevant conclusion that "understanding

might exist between masters and men” (Ibid.). It might be perceived as sorrowful that he needed such a big life change to realise it, but for the labourers in the novel it was better that it happened later rather than never.

To conclude, Mr. Carson’s demeanour was gradually soothed, and he realised that his antagonistic approach was not the right path to take anymore because it would end only in unhappiness, not only his but also his employees.

#### **2.1.5.2 Religion: the worker’s perspective**

John Barton had always tried to live by the Bible. Even during his infancy, he was interested in the texts the Bible contained, therefore he read it and he was trying to understand it. At first, his attempts were to behave accordingly, but when he realised that the rest of the society did not, especially the middle and upper-middle class representatives, he altered his behaviour, because he could not comprehend why he should have behaved according to it when the rest did not:

... I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I’d seen folk credit it; they all spoke up for it and went and did clean contrary... then I took out two or three texts as clear as glass, and I tried to do what they bid me do. But I don’t know how it was, master and men, all alike cared no more for minding those texts ...; so, I grew to think it must be a sham put upon poor ignorant folk.... (269)

What is notable is that Gaskell used religion as a tool of reconciliation. However, it would be incorrect to profess that it was only religion which contributed to the peaceful ending of the novel. One should still consider the strong female character who was also indubitably a significant contributing factor to the peaceful termination of the master and men predicament:

#### **2.1.5.3 Mary Barton as a tool of reconciliation between masters and men**

Even though Mary Barton might be recognised as a frail woman, she in fact represented the main reason why Jem Wilson was not hanged. Her endurance and belief that Jem was not guilty was such a mighty driving force that she managed to prove his innocence. Even though she could be perceived as feeble, she was not – the main thought this assumption is based on is that after Jem’s trial she was extremely weak and exhausted, and she even fell ill, but she survived, and she gradually got back the energy she spent on assembling evidence before the trial: “Never fear for Mary! She’s young and will struggle through” (245). It could even be claimed that she endured partly due to her faith in God. And not only hers but also the faith of the others: “Thou must trust in God and leave her in His hands” (246).

The reason why the section on Mary Barton as a strong female character is included here is that it was not usual in this era that women were peacemakers. This stemmed from the Victorian family concept of a “public man” and a “private woman” based on the idea that men were “the representatives of the household” outside, whereas women were the “angels of the house”<sup>6</sup>. It was not usual for women to be heard or to be seen and to publicly act against decisions of the authorities, or men. Still, Mary Barton was made a central character of the book, which not only added a romantic dimension to the novel, but Gaskell could use her as a tool of reconciliation as well.

In comparison with Margaret Hale from *North and South*, Mary Barton’s role of a pacifier is not so conspicuous as Margaret’s role is. Juxtaposed to Margaret, Mary did not stand physically between the two belligerent sides. Instead of actively opposing violence by physically demonstrating her resistance, she found her own individual way of dealing with the conflict between a master and a man through assembling evidence and believing in the strength of the truth as well as the power of her faith.

---

<sup>6</sup> British literature seminar and lecture information

## **2.2 *North and South***

Whereas in *Mary Barton*, there were two masters who needed to be introduced and compared, in *North and South*, it is only one character who represents the masters. Conversely, in *North and South*, there are more representatives of the poor who need to be properly introduced and analysed:

### **2.2.1 Masters and men**

#### **2.2.1.1 The depiction of the master**

The master's role in *North and South* was clearly embodied by Mr. Thornton. A man who through diligent and enthusiastic work from his early years and the economical behaviour of his family, especially the conduct of his mother, managed to create such financial resources that it enabled him not only to establish a vast system of mills, a company creating fine products bearing a name which eventually became world-known, but to pay all his father's debts from former years, too: "My mother managed so that I put by three out of these fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginnings; this taught me the self-denial." (*North and South*, 116)

In Gaskell's words, he was self-educated, economically wise, engrossed exclusively in business and his mother's and sister's welfare. He believed that every human being could through wise spending and assiduous devotion turn into a self-made man: "It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour..." (115).

He was modest, constantly fearless in both his life and business activities. It was also his decisiveness, at times bordering on stubbornness, which might be perceived as a positive character trait, too: "...you will never move me from what I have determined upon – not you!" (223). Another quote which might support the remark on his stubbornness might be the following one: "Di yo' ever see a bulldog? Set a bulldog on hind legs, and dress him up in coat and breeches, and yo'n just gotten John Thornton" (174). One might assume that such description was targeted at Mr. Thornton's looks, but this is not the case; this statement was aimed at his personality and his nature, which, indeed, seemed to be rather obstinate and goal-oriented: "But let John Thornton get hold on a notion, and he'll stick to it like a bulldog; yo' might pull him away ti' a pitchfork ere he'd leave go. He's worth fighting wi', is John Thornton" (174).

Mr. Thornton's perspective on the stratification of society is worth quoting, too: "I would rather be a man toiling, suffering – nay, failing and unsuccessful – here, than lead a dull prosperous life

in (...) what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly” (113). From his stance, readers comprehend that he took an extremely lukewarm attitude towards the bourgeoisie and one understands that he would not like to become one of them. One might be dubious whether the reason is that he was rather devoted to his occupation or whether he acknowledged that southern society would never allow his infiltration within their stratum. From another part, one might learn that “I won’t deny that I am proud of belonging to a town – or perhaps I should rather say a district – the necessities of which give birth to such grandeur of conception” (113), which only highlights his city nature and his esteem for grand thinkers and inventors, who were able to accelerate technical and industrial advancement. He was a pure man of Industry, a supporter of developments and improvements. Unfortunately for his workmen, he supported improvement only in the sphere of technology, not in the area of working conditions.

It is remarkable how his values and ideas were gradually altered throughout the story. After the unfortunate riot and subsequent commencement of a “friendship” with Nicholas Higgins (488), he started to be more oriented towards the conditions of the workers and potential improvements which did not only result in augmenting his profit but also ameliorated the living standards of the labourers, e.g., the canteen which offered rather cheap meals or the adjustments of the working schedule (422).

Previously, seldom did Mr. Thornton give an inch. The alteration of his views could have been affected by the riot, but from a reader’s perspective, one is almost sure that Margaret Hale also played a part in this influencing process. And even though he was probably aware of all the inconveniences and problems his workers suffered from, at the beginning, he mostly seemed indifferent to them and reluctant to take any step due to his limited notion that everybody has got the opportunity to become successful and self-made if diligent and zealous enough.

### **2.2.1.2 The depiction of the men**

From the general perspective, one would admit that the workmen were rather restless. As Mrs. Thornton said: “There is some uncomfortable work going on in the town; a threatening of a strike.” (152). If truth be told, the character of Mrs. Thornton offered an interesting understanding of the purpose of strikes: “... the truth is, they want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground. They are always trying at it; they always have it in their minds; and every five or six years, there comes a struggle between masters and men” (152). This quote might be remotely reminiscent of Marxist theory, which was implied in the theoretical part, explored particularly in the class struggle section (see 1.2.4.2).

What Mrs. Thornton was not aware of is that the workmen were on tenterhooks because not only did they feel threatened by the Irish workmen, who were brought to work in Mr. Thornton's mills instead of them, but they also suffered from being paid less than two years ago (173). She might be right that the workers wanted to become masters, but not of somebody else, but of themselves. To some extent, one may say that Mrs. Thornton's opinions were too closed-minded. The only grain of truth in her utterance could be that "make the masters into slaves on their own ground" was meant in the way that she did not expect the labourers to become masters and vice versa, but that the working people wanted to limit their masters' prerogatives and this limitation would have created a more level-playing field.

The labour stratum was represented mainly by the characters of Nicholas Higgins and his two daughters: Bessy, who unfortunately died at the age of nineteen, and her younger sister Mary Higgins, whom her two relatives intended to get educated but due to the lack of financial means Mary was eventually forced to leave the school and to commence a part time job in Hale's household; and the character of Boucher, an extremely poor man with an extensive family:

### **2.2.1.3 Nicholas Higgins**

Nicholas Higgins was a remarkable representative of the working class. He was a kind-hearted man, who took care of his two daughters and when Bessy died, and Boucher as well, he started protecting and guarding Boucher's family. Even before Boucher passed away, Nicholas showed his caring nature: "Hou'd up, man. Thy lile Jack shall na' clem. I ha' gotten brass, and we'll go buy the chap a sup o' milk an' a good four-pounder this very minute. What's mine's thine, sure enough, I' thou'st I' want. Only, dunnot [*sic*] lose heart, man!" (196). From this excerpt one learns that Nicholas Higgins was certainly not the type of man who was indifferent to the suffering of others and when compared with *Mary Barton*, one almost assumes that he mirrors the behaviour of John Barton, who was also trying to do his best when he could see people and their offspring from their community starving and suffering more than one could have borne (see 2.1.2).

Regardless of being caring and conscious, Nicholas Higgins had a weakness for alcohol, but he eventually managed to overcome it and despite him not being wealthy, he became a source of advice and recommendations for Mr. Thornton (488). The reason why Mr. Thornton became so interested in him could have been that Nicholas Higgins had two distinguishing characteristics, which even readers might consider extremely appealing: resoluteness and dignity. Notwithstanding his poor breeding, hardly ever did he lose his self-respect:

‘I’m none ashamed o’ my name. It’s Nicholas Higgins. Hoo’s called Bessy Higgins. Whatten [*sic*] yo’ asking for?’... ‘I thought – I meant to come and see you.’ She suddenly felt rather shy of offering the visit, without having any reason to give for her wish to make it... ‘I’m none so fond of having strange folk in my house.’ But then relenting, as he saw her heightened colour, he added, ‘Yo’re [*sic*] a foreigner, as one may say, and maybe don’t know many folk here, and yo’ve given my wench here flowers out of yo’r [*sic*] own hand; – yo’ may come if yo’ like.’ (102, 103)

When it comes to his stubbornness, this quality was demonstrated the best in the final chapters of the novel when Mr. Higgins was determined to get employed in Mr. Thornton’s mill even though he had led the strike against his employer. Nevertheless, what should be included is that Nicholas Higgins’s temperament was rather incendiary and if one takes into consideration that such a nature was even fostered by alcohol then extremely perilous behaviour was created. No wonder Mr. Thornton was so resolutely against employing Nicholas Higgins at first when he knew what Higgins’s temperament was, but eventually he was convinced by Higgins’s persistence.

To sum up, even though Nicholas Higgins suffered from being poor, he was still able to help others and to take care of them. He was also rather active in terms of trying to change the current conditions. Despite his flaws, one would argue that he was a rather good case in point when exemplifying the poor.

#### **2.2.1.4 Bessy Higgins**

Interestingly, Bessy was on a par with Margaret in terms of age and looks, the only difference between them was the contrasting social background. Gaskell was more than aware of this likeness and through Bessy’s life termination she expressed the contrast between the lower and upper-middle class environments rather well:

What is significant to note is that Bessy’s death stemmed from a so-called “industrial disease”. Bessy’s passing was mainly generated by substandard working conditions: “I began to work in a carding-room soon after /my mother’s death/, and the fluff<sup>7</sup> got into my lungs, and poisoned me... Anyhow, there’s many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood” (137). When Bessy was asked whether any measures could be taken to ameliorate that particular situation, the question was answered in the following way:

---

<sup>7</sup> “Fluff”: in Bessy’s words: “*little bits, as fly off from cotton, when they’re carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds around the lungs and tightens them up* (North and South, 137).



Some folk have a great wheel at one end of their carding-rooms to make a draught, and carry off th' dust but that wheel costs a deal o' money and brings no profit, so it's but a few of th' masters as will put 'em up; and I've heard tell o' men who didn't like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made 'em hungry, after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places. (137)

From these two quotes one can only examine what has been already discussed and explained: the interminable treadmill of events resulting in despair, exhaustion, discontentment, and death.

What is also note-worthy is that Bessy was not the only character who suffered from a terminal illness in this novel; Margaret's mother fell ill as well. The difference was that both sick women indulged in a different kind of "luxury"; Bessy was not visited by the doctor at all, whereas Margaret's mother was treated with utmost care. Bessy was delighted by the things which were for Margaret's mother normal, e.g., Margaret spending time with her and talking about everyday subjects.

#### **2.2.1.5 John Boucher**

John Boucher's family were emblematic representatives of the poorest of the poor in the Victorian era: "...while I take up John Boucher's cause, as live next door but one, wi' a sickly wife, and eight children, none on 'em factory age" (173). John Boucher was poor and desperate. Desperate to change the situation. He could not continue living like that. His family were starving, and he could not witness it anymore: "...and there's our lile Jack lying a-bed, too weak to cry, but just every now and then sobbing up his heart for want o' food, - our lile Jack, I tell thee, lad!" (195). John Boucher was perceived by the other characters as rather weak (196), and he was lucky to be looked after by Nicholas Higgins. As Bessy stated: "...if neighbours doesn't [*sic*] see after neighbours, I dunno who will." (197). She made a relevant remark: no matter how many troubles the people were suffering, the people in the community at least occasionally supported each other, which also later contributed to the establishment of such organisations as the Trades' Unions were - in order for the people to have at least some support.

#### **2.2.2 Social conditions and disparities**

"Oh mamma, mamma! How am I to dress up in my finery, and go off and away to smart parties, after the sorrow I have seen today?" exclaimed Margaret.... (199)

In *North and South*, Gaskell wanted to highlight the difference between the industrial North and the rural South. Her intention was to compare the representatives of the "old money" from

the south and the representatives of “the new money” from the north. She went even further in this societal observation: she managed to compare the labourers from both parts of Britain as well and then she finalised her analysis with a depiction of the clashes between the needy and the rich; the conflicts between the masters and their workers stemming from and fostered by the appalling working and living conditions:

#### **2.2.2.1 The difference between Northern and Southern England**

Not only does the title “*North and South*” refer to societal stratification, but it also demonstrates the disparate natural environments of northern and southern England. Margaret Hale’s family, before moving to Milton, used to live in Helstone county, despite its name, a most lovely and peaceful place to be. Through comparing two such incompatible places: one full of smoke and soiled, the second one offering peaceful nature and kind-hearted people, Gaskell managed to emphasise the overall unbalanced nature of Britain, as well as the immense town disparities. One might not be sure whether such a parallel may be vital, but when acknowledging that Mrs. Hale, even despite her constant dissatisfaction with Helstone, eventually started missing the old home and countryside and moreover, in Milton she died of a terminal illness, which was certainly fostered by the unhealthy environment Milton offered, one should at least bear such a comparison in mind. What should be considered is that Mrs. Hale’s health gradually deteriorated preponderantly due to the change of the environment the Hales committed themselves to. It is disputable whether Mrs. Hale would have died if the Hales had stayed in the Helstone area as, in Milton, the illness was at least fostered by the polluted air the Hales were exposed to. Besides, Gaskell made a rather attention-grasping parallel: both Bessy and Mrs. Hale died presumably of an industrial disease, and possibly, they became the victims of technological advancements and striving for gain so emblematic of the period of the Industrial Revolution reverberations.

#### **2.2.2.2 The issues of North and South**

“I wish I lived in the South.” said Bessy. “There’s a deal to bear there,” said Margaret. “There are sorrows to bear everywhere...” (171). This was uttered when Margaret was debating social conditions and disparities across the country with Nicholas Higgins and his daughter. When Bessy heard that in the south, there were no such problems as polluted air, her spontaneous reaction was to want to start living there, not continuing to live in Milton, a city full of smoke and filth. Due to Margaret’s portrayal, the south seemed to be a more lovely place to be, with almost no struggles and conflicts between masters and men, abounding in beautiful nature and nice people, however, from Margaret’s reaction further on, one learnt that the conditions of the

poor were bad everywhere and that people's lives were thronged with struggle, no matter what part of Britain they lived in.

Bessy's reaction was based on her first-hand experience with working in the weaving industry and even though Margaret alerted Bessy that in the country there were rather limited sources of food and difficult tasks requiring bodily labour as well (171), Bessy's logical reply was: "But it's out of doors... And away from the endless, endless noise, and sickening heat." (182). When Bessy learnt even more about the downsides of living and working in the south, she could not understand why Margaret was so fond of this part of Britain in particular. Margaret's reaction depicted the real state of things very well: "I only mean, Bessy, there's good and bad in everything in this world; and as you felt the bad up here, I thought it was but fair you should know the bad down there" (172).

To sum up, the workmen in the north suffered from, e.g., various illnesses stemming from the jobs they were performing, their health affected by the smoke, filth, and "endless noise and sickening heat" (182), whereas the workers in the south were probably afflicted by different issues connected with agriculture, i.e., difficult tasks and bodily labour.

Last, but not least, what is important to emphasise is that even among the poor some stratification existed as well: Even though the labourers were forced to live in harsh conditions, the Irish workers living in Milton were suffering even more (see 1.2.4.1.1), which can be understood as another disparity within one social class.

### **2.2.3 The conflict between masters and men**

#### **2.2.3.1 The problems before the conflict**

Why, yo' see, there's five or six masters who have set themselves again paying the wages they've been paying these two years past, and flourishing upon, and getting richer upon. And now they come to us and say we're to take less. And we won't. We'll just clem them to death first; and see who'll work for 'em then. They'll have killed the goose that laid 'em the golden eggs, I reckon. (172)

Judging by the quote, one of the factors which contributed to the strike was that the workmen were not satisfied with their wages. What is implied as well is that this wage difficulty was not the first one which had occurred.

Another factor which is also considered to have played a major role in fostering the strike is the ubiquitous idea shared among those who became wealthy and mighty: "...In fact everyone who

rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our /masters'/ ranks; it may not always be a master, but as an overlooker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order" (115). This is an opinion of Mr. Thornton, and however nice and true it may seem, the truth lies somewhere else. Practically, what he stated was that everybody who was attentive to their tasks, would be rewarded, which could not have been accomplished in the Victorian era due to various hindrances the employees and employers would have faced. One does not necessarily have to be a specialist in the economy to realise that the wages of such employees would have been higher and that the masters would not have been able to pay such people from a more long-term perspective. Moreover, neither the people, nor the society, were prepared for such a wage scheme. This might be perceived as a parallel to American history, where everybody during the second half of the nineteenth century, and even in the first decades of the twentieth century, was fantasising about reaching the "*American dream*", but only a few were able to manage it due to the sharecropping systems and due to no possible means of financial stability and security in that period. Cases in point were Mr. Rockefeller, or Mr. Ford, who through diligent work were able to adapt to the new conditions and to make a fortune from them.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, it must not be forgotten that there was still a plethora of those who did not make it and who were forced to live in poverty, deprived of all the luxurious benefits the rich had, as it was in Britain during the Victorian era.

To conclude, the problem of wages was a long-lasting one and the labourers did not want to continue working for less money than they used to. Furthermore, even if there were some lucky ones who were paid more, one needs to bear in mind that the people, especially the working class, had several children who they were supposed to provide with food and clothing, therefore Mr. Thornton's idea would have been viable only if the clerks and cashiers had lived alone and did not have, e.g., seven offspring to support.

### **2.2.3.2 Reactions to strikes**

"Why do you strike? Asked Margaret. "Striking is leaving off work till you get your own rate of wages, is it no? ..." But" said Margaret, "if the people struck, as you call it, where I come from, as they are mostly all field labourers, the seed would not be sown, the hay got in, the corn reaped." (171)

The quote above was derived from the part when Margaret and Nicholas Higgins were engrossed in a discussion about their stances on strikes. Margaret perceived strikes rather

---

<sup>8</sup> American literature seminar and lecture information

negatively, they prevented people from getting wages and “the farmers would have no hay, nor corn to sell that year; and where would the money come from to pay the labourers’ wages the next?” (171), one might even go as far as to state that Margaret did not see strikes and people striking as something which fostered the standard of living of the needy ones and in general help the people to some betterment. Not only did Margaret assume that these revolts were not necessary, but she also realised that people’s lives would have been better if it had not been for the industrial progress, which triggered the strikes: “If there is less adventure or less progress – I suppose I must not say less excitement – from the gambling spirit of trade..., there is less suffering also. I see men here going about in the streets... who are not only sufferers but haters” (113).

Nevertheless, Nicholas Higgins was of a different opinion, he considered the revolts to be conducive to augmenting workmen’s wages and their happiness, as well as the contentment of their families. What might be thought strange is that the whole conversation evolved rather easily and took a significant amount of time but during the whole period, Nicholas was talking exclusively about strikes and their impacts but not about their origins: “But all this time you’ve not told me what you’re striking for”, said Margaret again” (172). This very same observation is revealed by Patricia Ingham in the introduction to *North and South*:

No answer is ever given to the question that runs through the novel and is the title of chapter XVII, ‘What is a strike?’ This has now been transformed into another question, ‘How can strikes be avoided?’ And the answer to that is that, in contemporary society, they cannot... Strikes are not represented as misunderstanding but now exposed as symptoms. (21, 22)

According to this observation, one can state that strikes were indeed “symptoms”, “symptoms” of hunger, despair and the masters’ obliviousness to the horrendous living and working conditions of their workers.

It is advisable to consider Bessy’s stance on striking as well: “O, father!” said Bessy, “what have ye gained by striking? Think of that first strike when mother died – how we all had to clem – you the worst of all; and yet many a one went in every week at the same wage, till all were gone in that there was work for; and some went beggars all their lives at after” (172). This, even though based on Bessy’s calm composition and moderate personality, is partly true. The workmen put so much effort and energy into revolting against the labour schemes with expectations to alter at least some of the appalling circumstances, but the progress they achieved was usually seemingly small, almost infinitesimal. The labourers should be respected that they

endured so much and that they were able to be so zealous and persuasive that they eventually managed to change the situation, albeit slowly.

Mr. Thornton's notion about the problem lay somewhere else:

The power of masters and men became more evenly balanced; and now the battle is pretty fairly waged between us. We will hardly submit to the decision of an umpire, much less to the interference of a meddler with only a smattering of the knowledge of the real facts of the case, even though that meddler be called the High Court of Parliament. (115)

In this statement, unlike the one which was mentioned above (see 2.2.3.1), is a grain of truth. He said that even though the masters at times knew that their conduct was not the clearest and the fairest, they did not want to be told what to do by some third party, i.e., the High Court of Parliament, which did not know about the issue whatsoever. This is presumably not the problem of masters not wanting to do what they were requested but rather that at times everybody desires to act against the requests of the authorities, no matter how informed the authorities are, or what their intentions seem to be. In other words, the masters just did not want so many people to meddle with their issues so much.

To summarise, the workers perceived strikes as something necessary, something through which they could show their masters that they did not concur with their decisions, whereas the masters did not want to acquiesce to their workmen's requests not only because of the economic issues but also because they did not like meddling third parties and their rule enforcements. If we consider the perspective of Margaret, the stance of an impartial observer, we realise that she evolved from ignorance to a knowledge of both sides and that she attempted to understand the underlying cause of the problem, even though her original approach was that strikes were needless and limiting.

### **2.2.3.3 The strike**

A strike epitomises the conflict between masters and men. Although it is the culmination of the whole novel, the author devoted to it rather a limited number of pages. The reason why the poor struck was that they perceived strikes as a way of improving their standard of living. Readers can, however, find a down-to-earth perspective which does not pose these conflicts into a favourable light: "...the most successful strike can only force them /wages/ for a moment, to sink in far greater proportion afterwards, in consequence of that very strike..." (278). Despite this fact, the poor did not want to give up:

The people had already participated in various strikes before, but this strike was probably the biggest and potentially the most perilous one which had ever taken place in Milton. Not only was the origin of the conflict based on the predicament of wages which was explained earlier (see 2.2.3.1), but the true triggering point was Mr. Thornton's bringing the "hands from Ireland": "...My brother has imported hands from Ireland, and it has irritated the Milton people excessively – as if he hadn't a right to get labour where he could; and the stupid wretches here wouldn't work for him; and now they've frightened these poor Irish starvelings so with their threats, that we daren't [*sic*] let them out..." (217).

As the quote suggests, the original workers of Mr. Thornton's were enraged by this act. The reason for importing new workers from Ireland was that the English labourers were refusing to work for low wages, the cause of which was the overall economic situation, not only Mr. Thornton's whims and yearnings for gain. From a reader's perspective, this strategic move did not please either of the sides – the English workers were deprived of their jobs completely and Mr. Thornton had more difficulties with the Irish workers than expected; they were not skilled, they also suffered from fatigue and they did not endure as much as compared to their English fellows in terms of working hours and job requirements due to weariness, furthermore, they were already affected by the disadvantage of living in substandard conditions compared to those the English labourers were living in, as was established previously in the theoretical part, in the chapter concerned with Manchester (see 1.2.4.1.1).

The dissatisfaction of the English workmen resulted in a mob waiting in front of Mr. Thornton's gates. Surprisingly, their indignation was not oriented towards the Irish workers, which one would presume, but they felt truly antagonistic towards Mr. Thornton himself: "But it is not them – it is me they want." (219):

... Some were men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey. She knew how it was; they were like Boucher, – with starving children at home – relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages and enraged beyond measure at discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread. (220)

The labourers blamed the master for the numerous problems they had encountered in their lives and they were aware that the Irish workers, even though depriving them of their jobs, suffered from similar issues and troubles as the English did, therefore their all rage and indignation was oriented towards the man who triggered this situation.

It is certain that without the involvement of a female element, Margaret Hale, the situation would have turned out differently. However, one must admit that even with the incorporation of the Milton soldiers, this occurrence was rather peaceful – it did not include any significant harm, violence, or destruction, in comparison with real events – an example of such might be the Peterloo Massacre, 1819 (see 1.2.2.4).

#### **2.2.3.4 The depiction of the strike: style and language**

When it comes to the portrayal of the strike, Gaskell opted for a subtle way of description, preparing her readers for something looming in the foreseeable future, something large and threatening that gradually approached her readers and eventually got to them:

... An increasing din of angry voices raged behind the wooden barrier, which shook as if the unseen maddened crowd made battering-rams of their bodies, and retreated a short space only to come with more united steady impetus against it, till their great beats made the strong gates quiver, like reeds before the wind. (218)

She clearly employed the strategy of opposites: “strong gates which quiver” or “to retreat only to come with more united steady impetus”- these are only some instances where one might observe how well the oppositeness works and what effect it has on the reader. Gaskell gradually continued to build it all up even more; when she got to the portrayal of the poor in the mob, she compared them with “wild beasts”: “...It was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening. Even he /Mr. Thornton/ drew back for a moment, dismayed at the intensity of hatred he had provoked” (217). The point here is clear: both parties, the rich and the poor, were humans, however, the poor became so desperate and ravenous that their humanity slowly decreased, in some cases even evaporated, and eventually they became “beasts and creatures”. The extract from Margaret’s speech towards Mr. Thornton transmits the message about humanity the best: “Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don’t let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad... If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man.” (221).

What is interesting is that even though Gaskell showed the development of the conflict step by step, and she gradually employed more emotional lexis and a plethora of suspense, the climax of the conflict was rather disappointing. Clearly, Gaskell wanted to avoid this conflict and to suggest through Margaret’s intervention that a more humanistic approach could be successful.



#### **2.2.3.5 The clash between reality and fiction**

Gaskell clearly suggested a non-violent resolution of this conflict. She represented the strike rather peacefully through which she wanted to suggest that clashes do not always have to be violent. Through this paradoxical culmination, she wanted to convey the message that people would revolt against rules and restrictions which limit their basic human needs, but not necessarily through some violent manner every time they strike. One might also take into consideration that even though this rabble probably would have acted violently, they changed their decision in a split second when they realised what one badly aimed stone had caused (see 2.2.4). This can be perceived as a rather far-fetched solution, as in reality such a gigantic assemblage of people would not have acted so peacefully. This case, in particular, can be understood as a mirroring of Gaskell's conciliatory personality and a product of her wishful thinking.

What is rather fascinating is that the element of inequality can be analysed even in such a moment as this was. It was repeated numerous times that a crowd consisting of hundreds of people opposing one single man could not provide an equal battlefield at all. This was one of the instances when a master was less powerful than his workers and was put into a situation when he feared for his own life, which was the struggle his workers were so familiar with and underwent every single day of their lives: they feared not having enough money to provide food for their families, etc. It is questionable whether such a brief moment was enough for Mr. Thornton to reconsider his life approaches. However, what might be claimed is that this event became deeply rooted in his heart and subsequently altered his outlook, which might be perceived as rather far-fetched as well.

#### **2.2.4 The resolution**

Unlike in *Mary Barton*, the conflict is resolved much earlier, approximately in the middle of the novel, due to Margaret's bravery: "For she stood-between them (the workmen) and their enemy. She could not speak, but held out her arms towards them till she could recover her breath." (222). If Margaret had not been in Mr. Thornton's household during the time the people were striking, the soldiers would have punished the labourers severely: "The soldiers will be here directly, and that will bring them to reason." (220), ... "The distant clank of the soldiers was heard; just five minutes too late to make this vanished mob feel the power of authority and order." (224). When Margaret saw that Mr. Thornton was exposed to a more perilous situation than she had expected, she opted for the only strategy she thought could calm the enraged people. She wanted to protect him with her own body, but:

Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop... A clog whizzed through the air... A sharp pebble flew by her, grazing forehead and cheek... She lay like one dead... They were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion. (222, 223)

It is clear that violence was present in this strike, but the amount of it was incomparable to what could have happened if Margaret had not acted the way she did. Furthermore, it is also beyond compare with the amount of violence present in *Mary Barton*. Margaret's symbolic intervention clearly indicated Gaskell's conciliatory wishes; to spare people's lives and to diminish the level of violence causing injuries and deaths in the Victorian era.

We can even state that the way the strike was resolved resonated in the labourers more and had a more far-reaching impact than if it had been terminated in the traditional way using the militia: "Even the most desperate – Boucher himself – drew back, faltered away, scowled, and finally went off..." (223). It made them ponder it more, the harm they had caused was more relatable for them, therefore they sensed their "guilt" to a greater extent. Moreover, particularly this event helped the two main protagonists realise their feelings for each other, even though it took them much more time before they accepted them and before they stopped acting against their emotions.

### **2.2.5 Tools of reconciliation: Religion and a strong female character**

As has already been shown, Gaskell employed religion and religion-related solutions in resolving people's various problems. Her characters were religious devotees but, occasionally, in the harshest times, they stopped reading the Biblical texts and they did not believe in Biblical teachings anymore (see 2.1.5.2). Conversely, religion could also bring the people closer as well: "They never spoke of such things again, as it happened; but this one conversation made them peculiar people to each other; knit them together, in a way which no loose indiscriminate talking about sacred things can ever accomplish" (331).

#### **2.2.5.1 Religion: the master's perceptions**

Man of action as he was, busy in the world's great battle, there was a deeper religion binding him to God in his heart, in spite of his strong wilfulness, though all his mistakes, than Mr Hale had ever dreamed. (331)

As the quote suggests, Mr. Thornton was a believer, but his faith was covered by his zeal and by his business endeavours. He was a man of progress, which, at the first glance, might not seem to go hand in hand with traditional religious belief. Still, even though he was not a regular

churchgoer, his soft-hearted nature was displayed eventually, and it was expanded from being attentive to his family relatives to being focused on his workers' needs as well.

#### **2.2.5.2 Religion: the man's perspective**

Nicholas Higgins can be viewed as a mirror to John Barton from *Mary Barton*. He did not seem to be completely against religion, but he eventually concluded that some people were more equal than other people and he did not understand why he should behave according to the Holy Scripture if the others did not: "They (rich people)'re real folk. They don't believe i' the Bible, - not they. They may say they do, for form's sake; but Lord, sir, d'ye [*sic*] think their first cry I' th' [*sic*] morning is, "What shall I do to get hold on eternal life? ..." (275). A good example of Nicholas's disinclination to religion can be observed when Bessy, his daughter, died. His original intention was to go to a public house, to forget at least for a split-second his sorrow and sadness from his child's demise. However, he also acknowledged that Bessy's last wish was that he would not go to any such facility to drown his sorrows. Subsequently, when Margaret Hale offered to him to visit her father whom she revealed had been formerly a parson, Nicholas was extremely reluctant to go even though he knew that his original intention was not right and that it would be against Bessy's death wish. It is uncertain whether his disinclination to visit Margaret's father was because Mr. Hale was a religious figure or whether he preferred alcohol to speaking to whoever, no matter if the person were a believer or not. Still, it can be stated that Nicholas Higgins believed in God, but his faith was extremely well-hidden. It was concealed so much that even he was dubious whether he was a true believer or not.

#### **2.2.5.3 The unifying power of religion**

It has already been implied that religion was powerful enough to bring people of various classes and opinions together, which was highly interconnected with Gaskell's Unitarian belief. In the following quote, the uniting effect of religion as well as it being a tool of pacification can be observed the best: "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (281). This quote brings us many a binary; representatives of the upper-middle class prayed with a representative of the poor, moreover they all had disparate opinions on the world and religion as such. Still, religion was so powerful that it pacified, united, and reconciled them.

#### **2.2.5.4 Margaret Hale as a mediator between masters and men**

It is straightforward that Margaret was a true believer, as it can be observed in her train of thought: "We do not reason – we believe; and so do you. It is the one sole comfort in such

times” (276). She grew up as the daughter of a parson, whose learning affected her greatly, even though she spent a significant part of her life at her rich aunt’s household. Despite her wealthy relative, her faith seemed to be deeply rooted, as well as genuine. This faith was probably the reason why she was able to endure several difficulties throughout the novel and why she helped everybody who required her help, no matter whether it was in Helstone or in Milton. In other words, Margaret represented a caring nature and an extreme kind-heartedness, e.g., to Bessy or her mother whose every whim she tried to satisfy.

Through trust in God, Margaret got the power to physically oppose to conflict between masters and men. She stepped in and she spared many lives. Even though her role as a saviour and mediator between masters and men was crucial for the novel, Patricia Ingham in the introduction to *North and South* claimed that: “/the title/ suggests an interpretation in which Margaret Hale’s story is secondary to a broader theme of class conflict” (8), the conflict between masters and men. Still, she can be perceived as a tool of unification; unification between the poor and the rich; a tool of pacification amongst the poor; and a mediator between masters and men.

### 2.3 Comparison: *Mary Barton* and *North and South*

Through the analysis of both books, it can be concluded that both novels offer some differences, but also some similarities, which are going to be scrutinised in the following paragraphs:

Both novels were deeply focused on the conflicts between masters and men, one conflict was represented by a murder, another by a strike. Of course, some violence was incorporated in both novels; in *Mary Barton*, the assassin was deeply involved in the deed, whereas in *North and South* a huge crowd only threatened to attack.

In terms of punishment, the masters were certainly taught a lesson. It is disputable whether the punishment can be viewed as a parallel to the suffering of the poor. Probably not, because if the poor wanted to avenge every single death which was caused by or at least related to their masters' decisions and whims, they would have annihilated all the masters not only in Britain but also in Europe.

What is notable is that in both books, the author swapped the positions of the masters and men at least for a short time. Suddenly the masters became the more susceptible, they were those who suffered. Through this suffering tactic, Gaskell reached her conclusion and the desired solution. She was a sympathetic author, she wanted to show to her characters, as well as to her readers, that death or threatening situations could approach anybody, regardless of their social status. Gaskell aimed to demonstrate that even mighty people could find themselves in unfair and unbalanced situations, which were on a par with those their poor counterparts lived through daily.

One should bear in mind that we are in the world of fiction, therefore it is not surprising that the masters' behaviour was altered and that they commenced behaving in a better and more labourer-oriented way. Readers might wonder whether such conclusions were drawn from reality, or whether they were just pure figments of Gaskell's imagination. I would argue that unfortunately, this was a result of Gaskell's personality and attitude towards human suffering.

Last, but not least, each book also featured strong female characters whose fortitude helped to resolve the conflicts in the novels and who can be seen, alongside religion, as tools of reconciliation. There were many similarities between Mary and Margaret, however, in Mary's case the plot was resolved through her detective work, whereas Margaret's approach was more symbolic: she stepped between the masters and men in person and she, herself, mediated the conflict with her own action.

### 3 CONCLUSION

In the introduction of the thesis, I posed a question whether Elizabeth Gaskell's books contained sympathetic approach towards her characters and whether her style of writing offered pity and compassion. I also claimed that the goal of the whole work would be to explore, observe and analyse the conflicts between masters and men in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. The introductory part also stated that pertinent issues and events of the Industrial Revolution would be addressed, mainly with regards to both novels.

The theoretical part offered a historical insight into the period of the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian era. There were explored pertinent events and historical issues stemming mainly from the age of scientific advancement and it also explored how these changes affected the society. The analysis was focused on the social and political events taking place mainly in the period from 1810 to the 1850's. Namely, it explored hunger and other political problems, and the phenomena which correlated or were triggered by these issues, i.e., child labour, an extremely low standard of living or the Chartists' movement. Manchester, which was one of the engines of the Industrial Revolution, cannot be forgotten, partly due to the relation with the names of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, who used Manchester and its society for their observations and social analyses. The theoretical part was also concerned with religion with regards to class clashes and how religion could be used in the literary world to soothe antagonistic approaches of the characters.

The practical part offered a depiction of masters and men, how disparate their lifestyles were and how unbalanced the British society of that time was, everything supported by relevant parts or quotes from both novels. These aspects then culminated in the conflict depiction and analysis. Last, but not least, it observed Gaskell's approach towards religion and how religion in relation with strong female characters can work as tools of reconciliation.

In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell was exploring the workmen's dissatisfaction with their working conditions which were not getting better. The labourers wanted a more level-playing field, they did not want their children to starve anymore. They wished to communicate their requirements peacefully, they wanted to come to some unanimous agreement with their employers through strife-free discussions, but eventually, they were forced by their masters' conduct to change their strategy to be finally heard and understood. Many minor problems and social issues gradually culminated in a conflict, which was in this case, represented by a murder; the workers, opted for an irreversible solution: they deprived Mr. Carson of his son. They needed to make

their employers realise that their conditions were, indeed, serious. The workmen offered to Mr. Carson a parallel to what it was like when somebody's child dies. At first, Mr. Carson was full of rage and hatred but gradually, he realized, thanks to the Bible, that his behaviour had not been Christian-like and that if his conduct had been different and more humane, his workers would not have chosen such a solution.

Conversely, in *North and South*, the conflict was less brutal. The workmen participated in various strikes, because they did not want to accept the lowering of their wages and their replacement by the workers from Ireland. Margaret Hale took part in one of these strikes and unfortunately, she was injured while she was trying to protect Mr. Thornton against the furious mass of people who turned to "wild beasts" (see 2.2.3.4) due to their ravenousness and despair. Her injury, in fact, protected the labourers from being punished by the soldiers who were on their way to deal with the situation, therefore the people were spared being treated violently, at least on that occasion. This event also contributed to reshaping Mr. Thornton's life approach, as well as his attitude towards his workers.

In both books, social disparities were portrayed extremely well; Gaskell usually did not stick only to the depiction of disparities between the classes, but she went further, and she offered a meticulous portrayal of the disparities within the classes, which resonated and resonates with her readers even more than if she had performed the original intention only. The usage of religion and religious resolutions was an interesting way to deal with the conflicts as well. She signalled that anger should not trigger anger and that people should be more lenient and more humane to each other. Religion also helped her female characters to find the strength to deal with the life difficulties they were presented with throughout the novel.

The analysis of both books shows us that the structure and organisation of the plots Gaskell opted for is alike and full of binaries as well. Both novels contain depictions of horrendous living conditions, the working people's despair, their masters' conduct, violence, strong female characters, religion and its perceptions, and the clashes between masters and men. Through the analysis we learn how difficult it was for the people to subsist in the Victorian era and how problematic it was for them to cope with the advancements of the Industrial Revolution. Through the comparison of the novels, it is demonstrated that the periods of the 40s, 50s and 60s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were harsh and thanks to Gaskell's way of writing the books indeed trigger pity in their readers.

A comparison of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* not only offers a compact view on the antagonism between masters and men, but it also shows us the reasons why it originated.

Moreover, Gaskell brought us something more than a portrayal of the issues of that time: a potential key to these problems. Even though the issues were resolved in both books differently (murder X strike), we can see that the message lies somewhere else: let us solve our problems in a calm way while using peaceable solutions. Some might claim that this wish was unrealistic. They could be right.

However, Gaskell also wanted to affect her readers. Not only did she manage to affect them emotionally, but she also transmitted the message of the suffering of the poor and the struggles between masters and men to the vast groups of mainly female readers, representatives of the middle and upper-middle classes, which made this information public and widely discussed.

To sum up, Gaskell observed the society of her time extremely accurately, she provided her readers with a thorough depiction and portrayal of the social issues and problems. In some parts, she employed partially unrealistic solutions to emphasise the basis of the conflicts and the nature of people's dissatisfaction. As stated in the introductory part, she did manage to delineate the gap between the rich and the poor and she managed to draw her readers' attention to the social problems through her sympathetic way of writing, moreover, she was also able to show the reasons why the conflicts between masters and men originated and she depicted these conflicts in a sympathetic, meticulous, and memorable manner.



## 4 Works cited

### Primary sources:

Gaskell, Elizabeth, and Patricia Ingham. *North and South*. Penguin, 1995, E-book

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton*. Penguin, 2012, E-book

### Secondary sources:

---. "Chattel." *Lexico*, [www.lexico.com/definition/chattel](http://www.lexico.com/definition/chattel). Accessed 16 Apr. 2021

---. "Chartism." *Lexico*, [www.lexico.com/definition/chartism](http://www.lexico.com/definition/chartism). Accessed 16 Apr. 2021.

---. "Household Words." *Dickens Journals Online*, vol IX, 1854, pp. 269. Household Words Web, [www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-269.html](http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-ix/page-269.html). Accessed 16 Jan. 2021.

---. "Minor Victorian Writers." *MinorVictorianWriters.org*, [minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/hovell/index.htm](http://minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/hovell/index.htm). Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

---. "Monomania." *Lexico*, [www.lexico.com/definition/monomania](http://www.lexico.com/definition/monomania). Accessed 16 Apr. 2021.

---. "The 1833 Factory Act." *Parliament.uk*, last modified 2021, [www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/factoryact/](http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/factoryact/). Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

---. "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution." *Past and Present*, no. 17, 1960, pp. 71-81. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/649786](http://www.jstor.org/stable/649786). Accessed 17 Jan. 2021.

---. "Unitarianism at a glance." *BBC*, last updated January 2004, [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/unitarianism/ata glance/glance.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/unitarianism/ata glance/glance.shtml). Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

---. "Working life." *BBC*, last modified 2014, [www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/bloodlines/workinglife.shtml?entry=trade\\_union\\_congress&theme=workinglife](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/bloodlines/workinglife.shtml?entry=trade_union_congress&theme=workinglife). Accessed 9 Apr. 2021.

Andrew, Edward. "Class in Itself and Class against Capital: Karl Marx and His Classifiers." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1983, pp. 577–584. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3227396](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3227396). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

Bloy, Marjie. "Chartism." *The Victorian Web*, March 2002, [victorianweb.org/history/chartism/1.html](http://victorianweb.org/history/chartism/1.html). 18 January 2020

Bloy, Marjie. "Corn Laws." *The Victorian Web*, last modified in September 2016, victorianweb.org/history/cornlaws1.html. Accessed 16 Jan. 2021.

Bloy, Marjie. "The Luddites." *The Victorian Web*, 30 Dec. 2005, victorianweb.org/history/riots/luddites.html. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Bloy, Marjie. "The Peterloo Massacre." *The Victorian Web*, 2000, victorianweb.org/history/riots/peterloo.html. Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

Bowley, A.L., and George H. Wood. "The Statistics of Wages in the United Kingdom during the Nineteenth Century (Part XIV). Engineering and Shipbuilding. E. Averages, Index Numbers, and General Results." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, 1906, pp. 148 – 196. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2339551. Accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chartism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Mar. 2020, www.britannica.com/event/Chartism-British-history. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Cotton gin". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 4 Apr. 2019, www.britannica.com/technology/cotton-gin. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Brockbank, E. M. "History of Manchester." *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3551, 1929, pp. 167-171. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25331362. Accessed 13 Dec. 2020.

Busteed, Mervyn. *The Irish in Manchester C.1750–1921: Resistance, Adaptation and Identity*. Manchester University Press, 2016. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1b349q9. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Cameron, Rondo. "La Révolution Industrielle Manquée." *Social Science History*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1990, pp. 559–565. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1171332. Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Church, Roy. "The Industrial Revolution." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1996, pp. 535-543. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2640195. Accessed 17 Jan. 2021.

Diniejk, Andrzej. "Condition of England novels." *The Victorian Web*, 22 Feb. 2010, victorianweb.org/genre/diniejk.html. Accessed 5 Dec. 2020.

Engels, Frederick. "Selections from 'The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844.'" *Organization & Environment*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2006, pp. 389–402. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26162421. Accessed 20 Dec. 2020.

Everet, Glenn. "Chartism or the Chartist Movement." *The Victorian Web*, last modified 1987, www.victorianweb.org/history/hist3.html. Accessed 12 Dec. 2020.

Gemkow Heinrich., et al. "Frederick Engels: A Biography.", *Dietz Verlag Berlin*, 1970. [archive.org/details/EngelsBiographyGDR/page/n33/mode/2up](https://www.gutenberg.org/details/EngelsBiographyGDR/page/n33/mode/2up). Accessed 30 Mar. 2021

Gurney, Peter J. "'Rejoicing in Potatoes': The Politics of Consumption in England during the 'Hungry Forties'." *Past and Present*, no. 203, 2009, pp. 99-136. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/25580930](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25580930). Accessed 25 Dec. 2020.

Hill, Jeffrey. "Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early development of the independent Labour Party." *International Review of Social History*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1981, pp. 171–201. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/44581843](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44581843). Accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

Humphries, Jane. "Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution." *The Economic History Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 395-418. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/42921562](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42921562). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

Keen, Suzanne. "The Victorian social novel as a genre." The Victorian Web, last modified Dec. 2004, [victorianweb.org/victorian/genre/problem.html](http://victorianweb.org/victorian/genre/problem.html). Accessed 15 Jan. 2021.

Kingsford, Peter W. "James Watt". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 Jan. 2021, [www.britannica.com/biography/James-Watt](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Watt). Accessed 30 Mar. 2021

Landow, George P. "The Lack of Social Security in Victorian England." *The Victorian Web*, 2002, [victorianweb.org/history/work/eh3.html](http://victorianweb.org/history/work/eh3.html). Accessed 12 Dec. 2020.

McKendrick, Neil. "Josiah Wedgwood and Cost Accounting in the Industrial Revolution." *The Economic History Review*, vol. 23, no.1, 1970, pp. 45-67. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2594563](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2594563). Accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

McKinnon, A.M. "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion". *Critical Sociology*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, pp. 1515-38, [aura.abdn.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2164/3074/marx\\_religion\\_and\\_opium\\_final\\_author\\_version.pdf;jsessionid=8C59AEE8FC14728705F978A843EC8DF2?sequence=1](http://aura.abdn.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2164/3074/marx_religion_and_opium_final_author_version.pdf;jsessionid=8C59AEE8FC14728705F978A843EC8DF2?sequence=1). Accessed 16 Jan. 2021.

Mokyr, Joel. "Great Famine." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 4 Feb. 2020, [www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history](https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history). Accessed 20 Dec. 2021.

Rectenwald, Michael. "Darwin's Ancestor: The Evolution of Evolution." *The Victorian Web*, 2008, [victorianweb.org/science/darwin/rectenwald.html](http://victorianweb.org/science/darwin/rectenwald.html). Accessed 23 Dec. 2020.

Rogers, Nicholas. "Chartism and Class Struggle." *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 19., 1987, pp. 143-151. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/25142774](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25142774). Accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

Skipper J., Landow, G.P. "Wages and Cost of Living in the Victorian Era." *The Victorian Web*, 2003, [victorianweb.org/economics/wages.html](http://victorianweb.org/economics/wages.html). Accessed 18 Jan. 2021.

Werly, John M. "The Irish in Manchester, 1832 – 49." *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71, 1973, pp. 345-358. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/30005421](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30005421). Accessed 26 Dec. 2020.

West, Julius. *A History of the Chartist Movement*. Questia. Boston, 1920. Ebook. Accessed 12 Dec. 2020.